

No Ulterior Motive

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Summary

When Peter saw a spelling mistake on the Stark Industries website, he decided that he had to fix it, no matter what the consequences could be.

When Tony saw that the hacker that managed to evade him was a reckless, too-skinny foster kid, he decided that he was going to offer him an internship.

No ulterior motives.

Not at all.

(This is a total mess of a fic, but I hope you enjoy anyway!! Updates will hopefully be every Friday.)

Notes

Hi? Whoops, I have abandoned all my other fics for now. I'll get back to them soon, I promise!!

I don't think too much background is needed for this fic. May died with Ben, and Peter was bounced around foster care before ending up in the custody of Mr. Hadley. You'll meet him later :)

TWs: Mentions of hunger and allusions to abuse/neglect

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

Chapter 1

It was a simple enough hack, as far as Peter was concerned. The system was clearly built by millennials to protect against millennials. Nobody had considered guarding against a bored teenager on a decrepit library computer.

Break into some poor, unsuspecting worker's computer - simple enough algorithm. Log their keystrokes. Plant the bug. Don't trip the system. Watch and wait.

Peter tapped his foot impatiently, pulling out some homework to pass the time. He only had to wait for the worker to trip his bug, then he'd have a real foothold in the servers. Just far enough to access the public website, maybe peek at some blueprints if he was feeling particularly reckless.

Watch the ip, wait for them to access the servers. Get shit done. Or not. It's not like the school is going to fail him when he could pass any of their exams without breaking a sweat.

Peter's stomach growled. He still had to track down some dinner for the night, not to mention somewhere to camp out. For now, though, the only thing that mattered was the hack. That, and calculus homework. But mainly the hack.

Catch the login, decode the transcript. Mess with the location, close enough to approximate the offices. Stroll through the cyber-security like it's a baby gate -- no, scratch that, baby gates are annoying. Stroll through the cyber-security like it's the school exit on a Friday afternoon.

Peter smirked as his screen flashed up the classic Stark Industries homepage - shiny blue edit button in the corner. He had expected it to be easy, but this was almost underwhelming. Still, mission accomplished. Peter scrolled down to the 'about' page, and scanned for the anomaly.

"Here at SI, we are moer than happy to provide the public with the best technology available."

The spelling mistake had been bothering Peter for weeks. Once he had seen it, he couldn't *un* see it. Sure, he could've emailed someone about it, but hacking was far easier. Not to mention more fun.

Perfect.

With a contented sigh, Peter logged out of the website builder and lowered his location encryptions. He leaned back in his chair and admired his handiwork, the Stark website now proudly displaying their mission statement with no errors. His job was complete. Peter shoved his calculus homework back into his backpack and heaved his bag over his shoulder, waving to the librarian on his way out.

Even before he finished at the library that day, Peter had known that going home wasn't an option. It was a Tuesday, which meant Mr. Hadley would be in a particularly bad mood, and Peter didn't have the stamina to deal with that. An old, abandoned building would have to do for the night - that, or staying out on patrol all night. Not like he hadn't done both before, afterall.

(Sure, it probably wasn't healthy, but Peter wasn't exactly known for his self preservation.)

Before he knew it, Peter found himself at Delmar's. It was his favorite sandwich place, so it wasn't much of a surprise that his stomach had led him there.

"Hey, Mr. Delmar," Peter called as he strolled into the bodega. "I'll have a #5, smooshed down real flat." He pulled a crumpled twenty out of his jeans pocket; he made money doing odd jobs around the city and on the internet, just enough to keep him going. He was far from well fed, but he was surviving just fine.

"Coming right up, Mr. Parker," Delmar said, beaming as he began to prepare the sandwich. Peter had found the man's constant smiles and bubbly laughter annoying when he was younger, but now that he was 15, he saw it for the true miracle that it was. Not many people could see as much of the world as Mr. Delmar had and still smile.

Peter exchanged polite conversation for as long as he could manage, before paying for his sandwich with a polite nod, and slinking back out to the streets. He leaned against a dumpster to eat, right where he felt at home. It smelt vile, but Peter was hidden, and he was safe.

(To be fair, it was probably the least safe place that he could have been, but Peter felt at home in the shadows. He took any sense of home that he could get, lately.)

Peter sighed. It had been a less-shitty-than-usual day, but he was still exhausted. He longed for a

cozy, warm bed more than anything else, but such a thing felt like nothing more than a distant dream these days. Still, he was surviving, and he was Spider-Man. As long as he had Spider-Man, everything would be okay. Right?

For a billionaire, Tony thought about money far more than he wanted to. Sure, he never had to worry about spending too much, but Pepper couldn't handle all the finances alone. The company still had his name on it, which meant that it was his responsibility to figure out at least *some* of the taxes. Didn't make it any less boring, though.

Needless to say, Tony was far from disappointed when Friday piped up with a convenient distraction.

"I hate to disturb you, Boss, but it appears that our website's servers have been accessed by the PR staff."

"Not that I'm not thankful for the interruption, Fri, but aren't they supposed to be able to access the website?" Tony asked, turning his head towards the ceiling as if his AI had eyes that he could have made contact with.

"They should, Sir, but today is not a scheduled maintenance day, and no employees have logged emergency circumstances. There appears to be light encryption on the location of access."

"Now *that* sounds good, baby girl. I'll get right on it." True to his word, Tony pulled out his laptop immediately, pushing the stacks of forms to the side. They could wait; he had a particularly smart hacker to find. Not just anyone could break into SI, afterall, though their servers could definitely use an update.

By the time that Tony tracked the source of the breach, the hacker was long gone, leaving only one trace of their existence. A spelling error. They had fixed a spelling error, of all things. They had access to the most powerful company in the world, yet they only fixed a spelling error. Quite frankly, it was humiliating.

It would just be wrong for Tony to let this go unpunished, and the sooner the consequences the better, right? If he happened to procrastinate his work as a side effect, then that would be completely and utterly unavoidable.

By the time that Tony emerged from the swaths of messy code and surprisingly intact firewalls, hours had passed. All he had managed was to trace the signal to a public library - whoever this was had some real dedication. Tony didn't care about consequences anymore, he just wanted to offer the hacker a job.

A quiet but firm knock interrupted his thoughts, followed by an indignant cough. Pepper. By the sound of it, he must have missed the first knock or two as well. Shit.

"Uhm, occupied," Tony called, running a hand through his tangled hair. He hadn't brushed it in almost a week now. Whoops.

"This is an office, not a bathroom. I know you're in there, Tones."

Double shit.

"Oh, Pepper!" Tony exclaimed, figuring that feigning ignorance would be his safest bet. "What are you doing up at this hour?"

"It's 6 AM," Pepper deadpanned as she walked into the office and took a seat across from Tony.

"I... definitely knew that," Tony said, his gaze flitting down to glance at his watch. Pepper looked thoroughly unamused.

"Of course. Can I assume that you were at least busy with the paperwork that I gave you?"

Tony glanced at the papers spread across his desk, trying to hide his cringe.

"Well I was *going* to get it done, until Friday so rudely interrupted me with an emergent situation. A hacker, actually, which is definitively more important than paperwork."

"Did they do much damage?" Pepper asked quickly, her frustration melting away. Tony laughed nervously.

“Well, they fixed a spelling mistake.”

For a moment, Pepper looked like she was going to berate him yet again, but then she just sighed. Tony made a mental note to buy her some flowers later; she certainly deserved them.

“Just get it done, Tones. I can’t do everything. You know this.”

“Of course, Pep. I promise I’ll get it done,” Tony insisted. Pepper looked far from convinced. “Y’know what,” he continued, “I think I’ll be able to focus better at the library.”

There was most certainly no ulterior motive involved.

Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

Peter meets an interesting man with an even more interesting hypothetical situation.

Chapter Notes

Hi! Voila, a chapter. I'm hoping to stick to a consistent update schedule of Thursday nights, so yay! (I was gonna write in advance and actually be reliable, but I have no sense of commitment and a constant need for validation, so we're vibing with this :D)

TW: Mentions of hunger and neglect

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Peter had had a rough day, if he was being perfectly honest. He hadn't gotten much (read: any) sleep the night before, and he was running on two granola bars and a school lunch. For anyone else, that might have been close to adequate, but for Peter's metabolism it was next-to-nothing.

Still, he found himself at the library after school, just like always. It was quiet there, and he could do his dubiously legal work in peace. There was a surprising amount of people who were willing to send him 20 bucks to clean all traces of their ex off of their servers, afterall.

(Peter did the work and didn't ask questions. He needed the money, and it's not like there weren't greater evils in the world.)

He plugged his earbuds into his phone and tuned out the rest of the world as he logged into discord on the library computer. It was the best place to troll for desperate, rich incels, and he had picked up enough internet-smarts to avoid the pedos.

By 6 PM, Peter had earned himself \$15, which he considered pretty good for an afternoon's work. Sure, it was far from enough to afford him shelter for the night, but it could certainly get him a decent meal. Maybe he would stop by his foster home for the night; it depended whether he was willing to put up with Mr. Hadley.

Peter was just about to log off of the computer and head out before the library closed, when he felt the faint buzz of his spidey-sense. Immediately alert - any trace of weariness replaced by electric adrenaline - he took in his surroundings. It was late enough that the library was near empty, save for an old lady in an armchair and a man who seemed to be doing work on his laptop. At first glance, there was nothing suspicious. Then, he noticed that the man's laptop was powered down, and he was staring right at Peter.

Shit.

"Can I help you?" Peter asked, glancing at the man. He had a cap pulled down over his eyes, which was becoming increasingly suspicious by the minute.

“Yes, actually,” the man said, his voice surprisingly familiar. “I’m looking for illegal access to Stark Industries, if you could give me some tips.”

“I’m the wrong person to ask, man. I suck with tech, so-” Peter began, panic quickly rising in his chest. If he had been caught for this hack, he could easily be sent to juvie. He was too soft for prison, goddamnit!

(Okay, maybe soft wasn’t an apt description for literal Spider-Man, but he still had delicate feelings, goddamnit! He wasn’t built for jail!)

“Yeah, and I’m a purple platypus-bear,” the man said, closing his laptop and lifting the brim of his cap ever-so-slightly. Peter gasped as he caught a glimpse of the man’s face. It was Tony Stark. No question about it, that was the exact face that had been on every one of his school projects. Tony fucking Stark. His head swum with dizzy shock, but he retorted nonetheless.

“I mean, the color purple is said to represent immaturity and extravagance, so I wouldn’t be all that surprised.”

(Peter regretted it the moment after he said it. Well, mainly regretted it. MJ would’ve been proud to see the flabbergasted look on the billionaire’s face.)

“Well damn, you really are a little shit, aren’t you, kid? How old are you, 16? 17?”

“18,” Peter lied confidently. He hated his age. Surely if he was already taking care of himself entirely, he should just get bumped up to 18 automatically, right? He was far more mature than most 18 year olds, and not in the way that other kids always said before running off to smoke a joint in an abandoned building. He had seen enough shit to know what was a bad idea and what wasn’t.

“Yeah, right,” Tony scoffed. “How old are you really?”

“Are you calling me a liar?”

“Yes,” Stark deadpanned.

Well, it was worth a try. Peter knew when he was beat.

“15,” he muttered.

“And you hacked into the most secure tech company in the world?”

“In all fairness, your employees are very predictable.”

“So you admit you did it?” Tony asked triumphantly.

“What? No, I was just... speculating about how someone would hack into SI.”

Mr. Stark looked unconvinced, to Peter’s dismay. His thoughts spiraled to a black and white image of him clutching at prison bars. He silently mapped out the library’s exits and figured out where the fastest escape route would be.

“Alright,” Tony said, not bothering to hide his skeptical tone. “And if someone - theoretically, of course - did happen to break into Stark Industries, how do you speculate that they would have done it.”

“Well if it was me - which it wasn’t,” Peter began, eyeing the billionaire nervously, “I would break

into an employee's computer and log their keystrokes, then I would be able to decode their logins and the servers would let me in. Theoretically."

(Maybe Peter should have played dumb, but it has already been established that he sucked at lying. The fact that his identity hadn't been revealed yet was a true miracle.)

Tony raised an eyebrow. "And if, say, you were offered an internship for having successfully broken into the most powerful company on the market - nurturing young talent, and all that nonsense - would you take it?"

Peter's jaw dropped. Was he interpreting this wrong, or did Tony freaking Stark just offer him an internship? Obviously, he couldn't take it. There was too much risk; he could easily discover either of Peter's two deepest secrets - Spider-Man and his foster dad's neglect. But then again, how could he turn something like this down?

"Hypothetically, would this internship be paid?"

"Kid, I'm a billionaire," Tony said, rolling his eyes.

"So that's a yes... to the money?" Peter asked. He squinted at the man, trying to assess him.

"Yes, Sherlock. That's a yes."

Well, that made this more complicated. He really needed the money, but was it worth the risk? The answer was clearly no; he was surviving perfectly fine on the money that he had, and there was no logical reason to risk everything for this. But his weight was still dropping dramatically - so much that he'd had to cut back on patrols.

"I'd take it," Peter blurted out without thinking. "In this entirely hypothetical situation, I would take the internship."

"Great," Tony said, getting to his feet. "You go to that nerd school in Midtown, right? My driver will be there to pick you up on Friday. Don't keep him waiting."

Without waiting for any further confirmation, Tony tucked his laptop under his arm and marched out of the library. The old woman looked up from her armchair and tutted at him. Peter would have been more worried about her overhearing their conversation if she had spotted Mr. Stark before he was walking right in front of her. Shaking his head to clear out his thoughts, Peter slung his backpack over his shoulder and left the library too. He, however, said good night to the librarian on the way out.

(He didn't acknowledge the old woman, but who could blame him? She was intimidating, and Peter had the inconvenient talent of pissing off absolutely everyone he encountered.)

Instead of going straight home - or at least finding somewhere to rest for the night - Peter spent as long as he could possibly justify walking around Queens with shaky legs. After almost an hour of walking in circles, he had come no closer to understanding whatever the fuck had happened, and he had successfully exhausted all of the energy he had been saving for patrol. Great.

He grabbed a few sandwiches from Delmars, claiming that he was bringing one home to his foster dad. In reality, it would barely be enough to stop the sharp hunger pains from tearing at his stomach. He did plan on going home, though; it was inevitable at this point. Even sleeping on an air mattress in a dusty closet was better than a cold alley (most of the time, at least), and it had been a few weeks since he'd stopped by. Even Mr. Hadley might grow concerned if he was gone for much longer.

(Not that he gave a shit about Peter; he just needed to know that he would be alive for any impending social worker visits.)

By the time he got home, it was almost midnight, and Peter was exhausted. He wanted to patrol, but at this rate he knew that he would pass out mid-swing. That wouldn't be any fun for anyone. Mr. Hadley was already asleep, so Peter went straight to his closet.

(He considered himself a mini Harry Potter, just without the magic. He had given up on the childish notion that a giant would knock down his door and save him, though.)

Collapsing onto his mattress, Peter was almost content with his decision to take the internship. Right now, he needed the money more than anything else. Besides, he had kept his secrets for this long, hadn't he?

It certainly wasn't the allure of being cared for that drew Peter in; the way that Mr. Stark had almost looked concerned for him when he found out his age. It wasn't the notion of messing around with science and actually getting to exercise his mind for once. Yes, he was in this exclusively for the money.

No ulterior motive.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading, everyone! Don't forget to drink some water and take care of yourself. Comments, kudos, etc are always appreciated! (Y'all make my entire day whenever you interact <3)

Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

Peter has his first lab day <3

Chapter Notes

Hi, so this chapter is a mess, mainly because it is 12:20 and I did Not edit this. That being said, please comment any mistakes that you notice lol. Enjoy! :)

TW: mentions of neglect

“I’m sorry, Tony, I must have misheard you. What did you say that you did?” Pepper asked. Her tone was dangerously sweet, which gave Tony the distinct impression that she had not, in fact, misheard him. He gulped.

“Uh, I hired the teenager that hacked us the other day,” he said.

“And how old is he?”

“18?”

“Mhm?”

Damnit. Well, the lie was worth a shot.

“Alright, he’s 15, but he’s smart as hell,” Tony argued.

“Yeah, well labor laws don’t care how smart he is. Have you talked to his parents? Who will he even work for? You can’t just push a kid into a lab, Tones-”

“He’ll work for me, in my lab,” he proclaimed confidently. “He’s a nerd, he can’t be that annoying.”

“Do you even know how much confidential material is in that place? How many hazards? This is a child we’re talking about, not a toy,” Pepper said.

Something akin to frustration burned in Tony’s stomach. Sure, Pep had every reason to think badly of him, but he had hoped that she would see that he was serious about this. He wasn’t just going to dump the kid in a multi-million dollar lab and wait for him to blow himself up.

(On second thoughts, that sounded exactly like something Tony would do, but that was beside the point.)

“I know that, Pepper. This kid, he just... I wasn’t planning on giving him a job once I found out his age, but he’s smart, Pep. Scarily smart. A little too much like myself for comfort. I can’t just-”

Tony quickly cut himself off, noticing that his speech was bordering threateningly emotional territory. "I can't just let Oscorp or somebody scoop him up."

Pepper sighed deeply and pinched the bridge of her nose. Tony, once again, made a mental reminder to buy her flowers.

"When will he be here?" she asked.

"Friday. After nerd school, or whatever geniuses do these days."

"Alright. I'll make sure you aren't charged with kidnapping."

"You are a Goddess, Pepper," Tony said, grinning.

"And you need to do the paperwork that I sent you. And preferably baby-proof the lab," Pepper retorted.

"I will definitely do... one of those."

"You are going to be the death of me, Tony."

By Friday, Peter was decidedly nervous. He was already regretting taking the internship. What if Mr. Stark already knew about Spider-man and was just trying to lure him to the tower to run a million tests and implant eggs in his chest? He wasn't ready to be a father!

(Alright, that specific scenario might be unlikely, but nothing was entirely out of reach with his luck.)

When he had told Ned about it, the boy had been little help, practically bouncing up and down with excitement and jealousy. Since the day that Ned had walked in on Peter halfway out of his spider-suit, he had constantly been telling Peter how lucky he was. Respectfully, Peter disagreed.

Still, he would go to the ends of the earth for Ned, and he knew that if it came to it his friend would do the same. They were Bros.

(That didn't make the 'I wish I had your life, dude,' comments sting any less, though. But it wasn't Ned's fault. He didn't know any better.)

The two of them waited for Mr. Stark's ominous driver together, with Ned refusing to start his walk home until he knew that Peter was safe. To be fair, it did seem a little sketchy. The sketchiness level did not decrease as a sleek, black limo pulled into the pickup line.

"Are you sure this is legit, Peter?" Ned asked as they cautiously walked towards the car. Everyone was staring now, waiting to see which mysterious student would step into the car.

"Yeah, Ned, I'm pretty sure."

"And he doesn't know about... you know what?" Ned confirmed, making not-so-subtle web shooter hands.

"I don't think so," Peter said. "I'll see you tomorrow, okay?"

“Text me when you’re home. I wanna hear all about it.”

“Of course,” Peter agreed. He could tell that Ned mainly just wanted to make sure he made it home safe, but there was no point in pointing that out. Taking a deep breath, he stepped towards the car and stood awkwardly as the window rolled down a crack.

“Peter Parker?” an unenthusiastic voice asked from the driver's seat.

“Yep. Uh- that’s me.”

The man jerked his head towards the back seat. Peter quickly picked up that he was signaling for him to get in, and despite all the stranger-danger cartoons he had been forced to watch, he scrambled into the seat.

Peter had never been in such a fancy car before. Not even before his parents died. He was suddenly self-conscious of his ratty jeans and barely-holding-together shoes. Oh well. He would have money after this, then maybe he could get some new clothes. Man, that’d be nice.

The driver was silent as Peter buckled up. He seemed less than happy to be here, but Peter thought that he could at least try to hide it. That, or he was missing something. That happened sometimes too.

The drive was only fifteen minutes, but it was awkwardly silent for the entire time. Peter wasn’t sure if he should say anything, but he figured that if the driver (who he had mentally named Mr. Grumpy) wasn’t making any effort, then neither should he. Peter Parker was a lot of things, but a try-hard was not one of them.

(Not anymore, at least.)

Peter said a sharp ‘thank you,’ as he got out of the car in the Stark Industries garage, to which Mr. Grumpy gave him a nod of acknowledgment and tossed him a lanyard.

“Scan this and the elevator will take you to Boss,” he said, before rolling up the window and driving away. Peter was left awkwardly tugging on the strap of his backpack, gathering the courage to make his way inside.

(They couldn’t know about Spider-Man, right? He’d taken all the precautions he could possibly think of... but then why did Mr. Grumpy say that he was going to see the Boss? Was that some kind of euphemism?)

Peter sucked in a deep breath and walked towards the elevator. He scanned his card.

“Hello, Mr. Parker,” a voice called from the ceiling. Peter startled and jumped into a defensive position immediately, but the voice was quick to reassure him. “I am FRIDAY, Tony Stark’s personal AI. I have been instructed to take you to floor 92, if you would please step into the elevator.”

Peter snapped out of his trance and scampered into the carpeted elevator, careful not to scuff the pristine floors with his sneakers. He wasn’t sure whether he should reply to FRIDAY, but it seemed impolite not to thank her. Peter may have been a little shit, but he was still raised with manners, thank you very much.

“Uh, thank you, Miss Friday,” he said, raising his eyes to the ceiling awkwardly.

“You are very welcome, Mr. Parker.”

The rest of the elevator ride passed in silence as Peter shifted his weight from one foot to another. Floor 92 seemed like a high level for an intern to be going to. What would he even be doing as an intern anyway? Would he be science-ing or just fetching coffee? Would it involve socializing? What if he accidentally gave something away? Did Mr. Hadley need to give permission for this thing, anyway? Would someone call him? What if-

The elevator dinged, abruptly cutting off Peter's thought process. Immediately, his ears were assaulted with rock music, blasting so loud that it made his head spin. He stepped into the room, too focused on the noise to notice where he was.

"Ah, Mr. Parker, glad to see you made it," a voice called. "Fri, be a dear and turn the music down, would you?"

The volume immediately lowered, and Peter let his shoulders sag with relief. Then, he looked at his surroundings and tensed up once again. He was in a lab. Was this where they would cut him open and implant the alien eggs?

(Honestly, he wouldn't mind being cut open, as long as it was in this lab. The tech was clearly the stuff of dreams.)

"You good there, kid?" the voice asked. With a start, Peter realized that it was Tony Stark, bent over a workbench on the other side of the lab.

(Could his life get any more insane at this point? Meeting Tony Stark one time had been strange enough.)

"Uh, yeah," Peter stammered, "Just... wow."

"Nerd's paradise, right?" Mr. Stark said, grinning smugly.

"You would know, sir," Peter retorted.

Mr. Stark snorted and put his tools down on the workbench.

"I let you into my personal lab, and this is what I get? Harassment, honestly."

Peter was in Tony Stark's personal lab? Well, that was going to be fun to process later. He was almost starting to agree with Ned - this was pretty freaking awesome.

(If he ignored the possibility that he was about to become a twisted science experiment, at least.)

"This is your personal lab?" Peter asked, trying not to let the awe show through into his voice.

"What can I say, you impressed me. Figured I'd give the whole 'educating the youth' thing a shot. Plus, it gets me out of meetings."

(Oh, so that was the motive here. Well, Peter was perfectly happy with that. He knew all about symbiotic relationships; Mr. Stark would get out of meetings, and Peter would get paid to learn. Mr. Hadley got a nice check from the government, and Peter got CPS off of his back.)

"Alright," Peter agreed nonchalantly. Or at least he hoped that it appeared nonchalant. "What am I going to be doing? Fetching coffee?"

"Fetching coffee with a brain like that? Nah, kid, you're gonna be helping me out with science and shit. Stuff. I mean stuff. If anyone asks, I definitely said 'stuff.'"

“Got it, if any reporters corner me, I’ll tell them that you’re corrupting the youth,” Peter said.

“Oh, you little-”

“Innocent and mouldable mind here, Mr. Stark!”

Tony raked a hand through his hair.

“If you’re gonna be like that, at least call me Tony.”

“Okay, Mr. Stark,” Peter said with a mischievous grin. He knew that he was being annoying - even he could tell that much - but he was enjoying himself too much to reign it in.

(He knew not to let his guard down, but Mr. Stark probably wasn’t going to keep him around for long anyway, so he may as well make the most of it.)

Mr. Stark started by giving Peter some practice questions to test his skills. Personally, Peter thought they were a little too easy, but he pretended to struggle for a few minutes so that he didn’t seem like he was showing off. Mr. Stark still looked impressed, so he considered it a win.

Next, Tony let Peter help him out with the new Stark Car prototype. He was mainly just passing tools and offering ideas, but he loved seeing the way that all the different mechanisms of the engine fitted together. It was oddly relaxing. Then, Tony tried to make small talk.

“So, foster-care, huh? How’s that treating you?”

Logically, Peter had known that Mr. Stark must have run some form of background check on him, but that didn’t stop the comment from making his heart drop into his stomach.

“It’s fine,” Peter said, shrugging. “How’s... being a billionaire?”

(Nice going, Peter. That wasn’t awkward at all.)

“It’s fine,” Tony repeated with an amused smile. “Boring, honestly. Lots of taxes.”

“You do taxes?”

“No, he does not,” piped up a woman as she strolled into the room. She had long, blond hair and wore the type of heels that clicked against the tiles like tap shoes.

“Ah, Pepper,” Tony said. If Peter didn’t know better, he would have said that he looked almost intimidated by her. “To what do I owe the pleasure?”

“Oh, I just wanted to meet the teenager that managed to impress Tony Stark,” she said. “Hi, Peter. I’m Pepper.”

Peter reached out to shake her hand after quickly wiping the grease onto his shirt. MJ had talked about the almighty Pepper Potts too many times for him to miss an opportunity to shake her hand.

“Hi, Miss. Potts, Ma’am. My friend is a big fan of yours.”

Pepper smiled. “That’s lovely to hear. I trust that Tony’s been treating you well?”

“Well, aside from corrupting my young, malleable mind-”

“Yes, Pepper, I’ve been nice to the kid,” Mr. Stark said quickly, throwing Peter a meaningful look.

The teen merely smirked.

“I should really be getting home, though,” Peter said. “I have a test to study for tonight, so-”

“That’s very responsible of you, Peter,” Pepper said. “Do you need a ride?”

“Nah, I’m good. I was gonna stop by the store on the way back, anyway,” Peter lied. “Thank you so much, Mr. Stark. This was fun.”

“Of course, kid. You good to come back next week?”

Despite himself, Peter smiled.

“I’d like that.”

“Oh, and before I forget,” Tony continued, “I did say that this would be paid.” He tossed Peter two twenty-dollar bills.

Under normal circumstances, Peter would have protested, but in all honesty, he needed the money.

“Thank you so much, Sir,” Peter said, as he got to his feet and slung his backpack over his shoulder.

““Course, kid. See you next week?”

“Yeah! Thank you, Mr. Stark, thank you, Miss Potts!”

As the elevator doors closed behind Peter, he could’ve sworn that he heard Miss Potts say something along the lines of ‘you were right, Tony.’ He smiled to himself.

The cold, night air served to wake Peter up a little, and he quickly choked down a few granola bars from his backpack. He had a full night of patrolling to do, and he was going to need the stamina. Besides, with \$40 tucked away in his pocket, he could afford to snack.

Maybe this internship wasn’t going to be so bad, after all.

Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

In which Peter really needs some self-preservation skills.

Chapter Notes

Sup, motherfuckers (affectionate). I didn't mean to leave this on a cliffhanger, but I'm sleepy and busy being turned into a capitalist drone by the public education system. I hope you enjoy!

TW: mentions of injury, though nothing too graphic.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

So maybe - just maybe - patrolling on an empty stomach and two hours of sleep hadn't been Peter's greatest idea.

And maybe Thursday evening - the day before his second internship meeting - wasn't the best time to make this questionable decision.

And maybe he should have found somewhere to crash for the night once he felt himself fading.

Needless to say, when he woke up on the corner of a rooftop the next morning with an aching pain emanating from his side, Peter came to regret this set of choices. He had a vague recollection of breaking up a bar-fight-gone-wrong, but how he came to choose an abandoned rooftop as the perfect place for a nap was anyone's guess.

(Honestly, it was a miracle that nobody had found and unmasked him, but Peter wasn't complaining.)

Peter groaned as he heaved himself into a sitting position and rolled down his suit to reveal a deep gash surrounded by bloodstained skin. Great. He didn't have time for a stab wound today; he needed to get to school.

(Maybe if he ignored the hole in his side, it would go away? That's how healing works, right?)

(Spoiler alert, Peter, that is not how healing works.)

Peter grabbed his backpack - luckily he had never taken it off - and pulled on some decently presentable clothes. He sloppily tied his oldest shirt around his waist, hoping to stop some of the blood flow.

By the time he arrived at school, Peter was realizing just how bad his day was going to be. He missed the entirety of first period curled up on the roof, so as soon as he entered class all the eyes spun to face him. Some of them looked like they almost pitied him. Most of them just snickered.

(Oh, High School.)

The next time that Peter was fully aware of his surroundings was lunch. Ned had been shooting him concerned looks for the entirety of class - not that Peter had registered them - and he grabbed his arm as soon as the bell rang.

"Bad patrol?" Ned asked as soon as they were out of earshot.

(Peter wanted to say 'no, bad *life* ,' but that was too angsty for before lunch. Plus, Ned would worry. Ned didn't deserve to worry, especially not about him.)

"Yeah," Peter huffed. Every step sent pain shooting through his abdomen, so he steered Ned into their favorite hallway. The pair dropped their bags and sat down against the wall. They had stopped eating at the Caf once Peter had started getting overwhelmed by the noise. The teachers knew that they weren't trouble, so they let it slide.

"Need any... first-aid?" Ned asked uncertainly. Despite himself, Peter snorted.

"Ned, bro, I love you, but I am not letting you within ten miles of a first-aid kit." Ned's cheeks flushed, but he knew it was right.

"Fair. Anything I can do?"

“Honestly, I just need some quiet, I think,” Peter admitted. “You can go and sit with MJ if you want, I’m probably not gonna be much fun today.”

Ned raised his eyebrows at Peter. “And leave my bro alone? Never. I’ll get a headstart on some homework.”

Peter smiled and slipped his earbuds into his ears. In most situations that would probably come across as rude, but Ned knew that sometimes Peter could only stand human-ing for a certain amount of time.

(That was definitely something that he needed to work on... Peter made a mental note to add it to his ever-growing ‘things-to-discuss-if-you-can-ever-afford-a-therapist’ list.)

Before Peter could properly register the passing of time, he and Ned were huddled together under the overhang, waiting for Mr. Stark’s driver’s car. Peter wasn’t sure when it had started raining, but that didn’t really matter.

Once again, all eyes flew to the fancy car as soon as it arrived. Peter bid a melancholy goodbye to Ned and hobbled into the backseat. His side seemed to hurt *worse* than it had done that morning, which made no sense whatsoever to Peter. Maybe he was just too tired to heal properly. That was probably it.

Mr. Grumpy grunted his acknowledgment and promptly closed the divider, blocking off the back seats. Peter was a little glad, to be honest. He needed the time to regroup if he didn’t want Mr. Stark to worry. Not that Mr. Stark would worry about him. Or that Peter cared if he did.

(Peter needed Mr. Stark for his money, and Mr. Stark needed Peter to get out of meetings. That was how it worked, as far as Peter could tell.)

Mindful of Mr. Grumpy in the driver’s seat, Peter lifted the corner of his shirt. His makeshift bandage was now soaked with blood, almost bleeding through to his hoodie. Great. There was no chance that he could even attempt to fix it without Mr. Grumpy noticing.

(His hoodie was black anyway, so hopefully the blood wouldn’t show through. He would have to count on that.)

By the time that Peter had finished scarfing down two of the energy bars that were buried in his backpack, they had arrived at Stark Tower. Peter tapped his fingers against the strap of his backpack as the car pulled to a stop, drumming out a rhythm to match his heart rate.

“Thank you, sir,” Peter said quietly as he got out of the car.

“Call me Happy, kid.”

Peter wasn't sure if the man was joking or not, but it was definitely a better name than Mr. Grumpy. He nodded and offered his best attempt at a smile, before making his way to the elevator as Happy drove away. He scanned his card, and the elevator opened for him.

“Welcome, Mr. Parker,” said the ceiling voice - Friday, if Peter remembered correctly.

“Hi,” Peter replied cautiously. He still felt uncomfortable talking to someone that he couldn't see. “Can you take me to the same place as last time?”

“Of course, Mr. Parker, however I am detecting a moderate concussion and a grade two skin laceration, which indicates that the Med-bay is a more logical destination. Would you like me to take you there instead?”

(Huh. Peter hadn't even noticed the concussion. To be fair, he *was* pretty out of it.)

“No, no, I'm fine,” Peter insisted hastily. “Can you just take me to the lab, please?”

Peter held his breath. Would Friday tell Tony? Surely she had to be loyal to her creator, but hopefully, she still respected privacy. It was Peter's stab wound, and he should get to decide what to do with it!

(Okay, now Peter was starting to agree that he had a concussion.)

“Certainly, Mr. Parker. Let me know if you require any further assistance.”

Peter breathed a sigh of relief.

“Thank you, Miss Friday.”

Friday didn't respond, but the elevator began its climb. Peter leaned against the wall. When did it get so hot in here? Nope. No fever allowed, Peter told himself. He was going to get through this, and then he was going to heal perfectly overnight. Positive attitude.

(Unfortunately, a positive attitude can't heal a stab wound.)

Despite himself, Tony was looking forward to seeing the kid again. It was refreshing to be in the company of someone who could match his own genius, even if said somebody was a sweaty, angsty teenager. In fact, Peter even seemed less angsty than he had expected. Maybe it was a nerd thing.

(Probably a nerd thing.)

Needless to say, he had waited in his lab for almost an hour in advance, setting up some IQ tests for the kid. Pepper would have been proud to see how organized he was being - she had even given him an entire afternoon away from meetings.

(That had been the whole point of this in the first place, really, so it was good to see that it was working.)

As soon as Peter arrived, however, Tony could tell that something was off. He looked oddly pale, and the hyperactive bounce that he had seen the week before was entirely missing.

“Sup, kid,” Tony said as he walked over to meet Peter. He thought about addressing his state but decided that it would be better to just give the kid some work and let him relax. He was probably just tired, after all. That was a teen thing, right?

“Hi, Mr. Stark,” Peter mumbled. Tony narrowed his eyes. Were teenagers always this angsty?

“You good there, kiddo?”

“Not a kid,” Peter muttered. Tony relaxed a little - at least he wasn’t too tired for snark. “But yeah, just tired. School.”

“Ah, yes. I feel your pain,” Tony said.

“Didn’t you skip like... most of High School?”

“Not the point. Anyway, if you wanna work on some homework or whatever you kids do these days, feel free to.”

“Really?”

“Course, kid. I’m not a total asshole.”

“Debatable,” Peter muttered under his breath. Tony smirked but didn’t respond. The kid clearly needed a break.

Tony went back to tinkering with a new gauntlet, and Peter set up his work in the corner. The two of them worked in harmony for a while, with Tony too absorbed in his science to notice the way that Peter’s grip on his pencil was steadily loosening.

(Ever since he was a kid, Tony had had the unfortunate habit of losing himself in science for hours on end, oblivious to the world around him.)

(Usually, it wasn’t a problem.)

(Today, though, it meant that nobody noticed Peter’s heart rate slowing until his head dropped onto the table with a hollow thunk.)

Chapter End Notes

... sorry? This chapter is kind of a mess, but y'know, we tried. Sidenote, I tried to make the way Peter and Ned eat lunch realistic by basing it off of me and my amazing friend - you'd be surprised how many teachers give zero fucks. Hope you enjoyed!
<33

Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

Peter wakes up in an unfamiliar place, and Tony gets a phone call.

Chapter Notes

Hiya hi, here's this week's chapter! Quick note: ca:cw happened the same in this universe, but Spider-Man was never involved. Hope you enjoy!

TW: Gun violence and blood in the dream sequence at the start.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Red, red, everything red.

Not the nice kind of red.

Not the red of fire trucks or cherry popsicles.

Not the red of rubies or poppies or a ladybird's fragile wings.

The sickening, unmistakable red of blood.

It poured from the chest of Peter's uncle and the head of his aunt, pooling on the floor in a slowly expanding puddle. It soaked the knees of Peter's jeans as he kneeled on the linoleum tiles.

Vaguely he registered someone trying to talk to him. Someone calling the police. Someone screaming.

Nobody ever tells you how sticky blood is. It's liquidy at first, but as air interacts with the clotting factors, it starts to suction your fingers together whenever they touch. Even at twelve, Peter knew this.

Still, there was something innately grotesque about the sensation. He focused on science. He imagined that he could see the platelets working. He stared at the lifeless eyes of his aunt and uncle, and he imagined their bodies' last-ditch efforts to survive.

It was still sticky. Nobody warned him about how sticky it would be.

Soon, an officer had Peter by the arm, attempting to haul him to his feet. He almost slipped on the blood, and he grabbed onto one of the shelves to steady himself. The officer tried to say something to him, but Peter couldn't hear it over the incessant ringing of his ears.

Someone put a shock blanket over him and sat him down on the curb. All he could look at was his blood-soaked jeans.

Red, red, everything red.

Peter awoke with a start. Waves of pain emanated from his side. What had happened? Where was he? How had he gotten here?

The room was tiled, and he was laying in a bed. A very comfortable bed. That was an instant clue that something was up. That, and the rhythmic beeping.

(Oh. Oh.)

The memories flooded back to him. How could he have been so stupid? The wound was clearly infected. Why did he even go to school?

Oh right. Concussion. That's why.

(Nice job on that one, Peter.)

Okay, Peter thought to himself. Assess, plan, react. Just like always.

Assess: Peter was alone (for now) in a hospital room. He had passed out in front of Mr. Stark, who had almost definitely discovered his very-infected stab wound. That in turn meant that someone must have seen his healing. And the state of his body. Peter was no doctor, but he knew that it wasn't a good sign for his skin to be stretched this tightly over his ribs. Any Responsible Adult would call child services the second they saw him. Luckily, Tony wasn't all that responsible.

Plan: Peter needed a cover story. The easiest thing would be to claim that he got mugged a week or two ago since that would explain the already-semi-healed stab wound. The medical timeline would be far from accurate (as previously noted, Peter was certainly not a doctor), but there weren't many other choices.

React: The best course of action would probably be to ask Friday what was going on. He would have to act scared and disoriented in order to play the part of a confused kid, but Peter had become somewhat adept at acting over the past few years.

In reality, not much of it would be acting. He was confused, and he was a kid.

(And, though he'd never admit it, Peter was a little scared too.)

Peter drew in as deep of a breath as he could without wincing from the pain. "Hey, uh, Miss. Friday?" Peter began, surprised at the roughness in his throat. "I- Where am I?"

"You are in the Med-Bay of Stark Tower, Mr. Parker," Friday chirped enthusiastically. Peter centered himself. Not as bad as a hospital. "Would you like me to inform Boss that you are awake?"

Boss - That was Mr. Stark if Peter remembered correctly. Would it be too much of a bother for Peter to ask for him? He couldn't lose this internship (if he had any chance of keeping it after passing it out on his boss.) Med-Bay meant medical bills which meant money that he didn't have. Money that he might have a chance of making if he kept the internship.

On the other hand, it would reinforce his scared-kid act if he asked for Tony. He was, after all, a familiar face. Any kid that had just woken up in an unfamiliar place would want to see a familiar face.

(He definitely didn't want to see him. That most certainly wasn't a factor. It was for the act. All for the act.)

"Uh, yeah, Friday," Peter said. "Tell him, please."

If he was going to lose the internship, he probably already had. He may as well commit to the act, Peter figured.

"Of course. Mr. Stark will be informed."

"Thank you, Miss. Friday."

"My pleasure, Mr. Parker."

Peter gently maneuvered himself into a sitting position on the freakily comfortable bed. He prodded at his side, wincing at the crinkle of the paper hospital gown. Someone must have changed him. To his relief, though, his shorts were still on underneath.

The wound itself felt marginally better than before. Someone had obviously treated it, as Peter could tell from the swathes of bandages that he could feel. He didn't want to lift the gown to check it properly, but there was less heat radiating from the site than there had been that morning. That was probably a good sign, but once again, Peter was most certainly not a doctor.

Before Peter could get too far on his self-evaluation, the door opened, and Mr. Stark rushed in.

"Peter! How're you feeling? What the hell happened?"

Okay, Peter thought, time to react.

"Uh, hi, Mr. Stark. I got mugged, uh, last week. Yeah. I got mugged last week." *Way to sound sure of yourself, Peter*, he reprimanded himself. *Stop talking before you dig yourself into a hole.*

"And you didn't think that it might be a good idea to, I don't know, tell a responsible adult?"

“Well, if you told me where to find one of those, I would happily oblige.”

Tony raised an eyebrow. Peter cringed. Not the time for jokes, he noted.

“I just... I just didn’t want to bother anyone,” he said. Slightly closer to the truth. Even before he had gotten his powers, Peter had tried to hide every injury he ever got (and as a sickly, bullied kid, that had been a lot). Ben had hated it.

“-Kid? You listening to me?”

Peter quickly startled back into reality.

“Huh? Oh, sorry. I, uh, zoned out.”

Tony sighed. Peter couldn’t tell if he was angry or disappointed. Or maybe even worried.

“You can’t just go around hiding stab wounds, Pete. You scared me.”

(Why would Mr. Stark be scared? Was he responsible for Peter during internship hours? He wouldn’t know that nobody would care if he showed up dead, Peter assumed.)

“I’m sorry,” Peter said, biting back his sarcasm for a minute. He owed Mr. Stark a little sincerity. He had just saved his life, after all.

“Just don’t do it again, okay, kid?”

““Course,” Peter lied. “Wouldn’t want to make your old-man heart quit out on you.”

Tony snorted, before sobering.

“You know you can talk to me, right, Peter? I know that we just met, but I can tell you’re a good kid. You deserve someone in your corner.”

Now Peter was *really* confused. He must have made Mr. Stark feel *really* guilty for him to talk like that. Or maybe he just wanted to avoid Peter getting hurt again. He needed an excuse to get out of meetings, after all.

(As twisted as it was, though, Peter felt warmth growing in his chest at the idea of someone being invested in his existence. Someone caring if he lived or died.)

“Thanks, Mr. Stark,” he said.

“Of course.”

Peter smiled, letting himself relax back onto his bed. Luckily, before the situation could get too awkward, Friday piped up.

“Sir, you have an incoming call from General Ross.”

“Send him to voicemail, Fri.”

“I already tried, Boss. He says that it is an urgent matter concerning the Sokovia Accords.”

Peter couldn’t help but notice the way that Tony’s face blanched at the mention of the accords. He didn’t even want to *think* about the amount of trauma the man must have regarding them.

“Shit, Pete, I gotta go. The doctor will be through in a minute to talk to you. See you later, okay?”

“Okay,” Peter confirmed. Tony gave him a sharp nod and left the room.

Peter closed his eyes, and for once he was too tired to notice the red haze of his dreams.

“You cannot keep ignoring this issue, Stark,” Ross snapped. Tony leaned against the wall. He *really* didn’t need this today.

“Yeah? I’m a big boy, Ross, I can do what I want.”

“Not when it concerns national security, Tony. The rouges are going to be coming back, and that is final.”

(Yelling. Screaming. A vibranium shield in his chest. Cold. So much cold.)

“Not happening.”

“It’s this or sending them to the Raft. They can only be pardoned if they are under close supervision, and you are the only one who is qualified to keep them under control.”

“I said *not happening* .” Tony snapped.

“Then that’s too bad. They’re coming.”

Before Tony could retort, General Ross hung up the phone, leaving Tony fuming. *Tony Stark* did not get hung up on. He was the one that was supposed to do the hanging up!

(Blond hair and blue eyes, that stupid fucking metal arm, that stupid fucking soldier.)

Tony ran an exasperated hand through his hair. He had enough on his plate right now. He wasn’t buying Peter’s story for a second. Which meant that somebody had stabbed his intern. That felt like an imminent problem.

(Tony definitely didn’t care about the kid. Tony Stark cared for nobody but himself. And maybe Pepper Potts. God, Pep was gonna kill him.)

Tony didn't know when he had grown so close to Peter. He was utterly intrigued by the kid's brain, not to mention his morality. How did a kid that had been handed such a shitty hand end up so goddamn *good* ?

He would have to protect Peter from the rouges. He couldn't let the rouges ruin anything else for him.

And, of course, he needed an intern.

That was it. An intern.

That's all.

Chapter End Notes

Woo woo! These two totally aren't growing attached to each other. Of course not.

In other news, I answered a question in class today for the first time in 6 years (I have issues)!!!! just wanted to brag about that lol. Also, if you haven't seen it already, go watch Bo Burnham's new comedy special because it is INCREDIBLE (tw tho, it's pretty dark). Also LOKI!!!! euyseuesiygbseuie.

Alright, that's enough rambling for the day. Comments and kudos are always appreciated <3

Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

Peter meets one of his idols and talks to Tony.

Chapter Notes

Early update because school's finally out and I have time!!! Hopefully updates will be more frequent now :)

TW: Medical-things I guess?

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

By the time that Peter woke up next, his wound hardly even stung. Usually, this would have been cause for celebration, but right now he didn't want anyone knowing about his super-spidey-healing. That would be catastrophic.

Peter was so caught up in his meticulous excuse (it's just a really fast metabolism, Sir, I swear,) that he failed to notice the reason that he had awoken until a woman said his name. A woman who was most certainly a doctor - wait, that wasn't just any doctor, that was Helen Cho! World-renowned research scientist!

(Peter wasn't having a fanboy breakdown. Absolutely not.)

"Peter? Are you awake?"

"Huh? Uh, yeah. Yes."

Dr. Cho laughed ever so slightly, amused at the boy's stammering excitement. Peter blushed.

"I- uh, I'm a big fan of your work, Ma'am," Peter said. So much for the gritty, sarcastic persona that he was definitely maintaining. This was *Dr. Helen Cho*, though, so Peter didn't care about appearances.

(Every nerd needed to fanboy every so often.)

“Thank you, Peter,” Dr. Cho said with a gentle smile. “It’s nice to be appreciated, for a change.”

“Yeah, uh, my friend really admires how far you’ve gotten as a woman of color in STEM. Y’know, given how the field is dominated by cishet white men, like... uh... Mr. Stark.”

Peter immediately regrets the rant, but Dr. Cho seems amused.

“Your friend seems very smart. Onto you, though,” Dr. Cho began. Peter held his breath. “Nice metabolism you got. Mutation or enhancement?”

(Ohhhhh *shit* .)

“Relax, kiddo. Contrary to popular belief, I abide by doctor-patient confidentiality.” Peter visibly relaxed, slumping back onto his bed. “I know what it can be like to be a mutant in this day and age. I’m not gonna out you.”

“Thank you so much, Ma’am,” Peter said softly.

“Call me Helen. You do need to keep on top of that metabolism, though. Your body is like nothing that I’ve ever seen before. You must need a tremendous amount of food to maintain it.”

(Peter almost laughed. He hadn’t felt full since the day that the spider bit him.)

“Yeah,” Peter muttered. “I do.”

“Well, as long as you keep up with it, I see no reason to inform your guardian of your... status. Do we have a deal?”

“Yes, Miss, uh, Helen. Thank you.”

“Of course. Keep yourself safe, Peter.”

Peter nodded his affirmation, though he had no intention of keeping his promise. To be fair, he would have if it was a possibility. He wished he had enough food to keep his metabolism satisfied and at its full potential, but that was far from realistic.

It sucked, but it was reality. Peter was no stranger to reality.

Tony was stressed. His mind constantly flitted through images of the rogues standing above him menacingly and Peter bleeding out on the concrete. There was no way that he was getting any sleep.

For almost an hour, Tony tried to tinker in the lab, but it was too quiet. Peter had only been there two times, but it already felt wrong to not explain every step to him as he took apart an engine. He threw the engine across the room and it exploded against Peter's lab table with a resounding crash.

(If Pep was here, she would call this an ‘unhealthy coping mechanism,’ but she was fast asleep and Tony planned to keep it that way.)

Eventually, Tony found himself venturing down to the med-bay in the dead of night. He couldn't stop thinking about Peter. Peter passed out in an alley. Peter slumped over a school desk. Peter with blood spreading across his shirt.

(Peter with a vibranium shield in his chest.)

It was dark, excluding the dim floor lights that gave the tiles a yellow-ish glow. Tony's shoes clacked as he walked. He had spent far too many nights in this place - broken and banged up. Pepper was always by his side, though. Peter didn't have a Pepper.

Tony opened the door to Peter's room quietly, not wanting to wake the kid. Cho had said that he could be discharged that same morning as long as he got enough rest. God knows the kid must want to go home, he thought to himself.

Peter was sitting upon his bed, scribbling in a notebook under the light of his phone's flashlight. He didn't even notice when Tony tiptoed inside. As much as he wanted to watch the kid working, it felt like an invasion of privacy, so he cleared his throat. Peter startled and slammed his notebook closed.

(What was he even writing - porn? That was a thing these days, right?)

"Sup, kid. Can't sleep?"

Peter rubbed the back of his neck sheepishly. He looked far more vulnerable than he ever had in the lab, dressed in hospital pyjamas and swaddled in blankets. "You could say that," he admitted.

"Sleep is important, Pete."

"Says you."

"Touche." Tony flicked on the lamp on Peter's bedside and sank into the chair in the corner of the room. Neither of them were going to be getting much sleep, he guessed. "So, what were you working on?"

"Oh, nothing," Peter mumbled, but Tony could see traces of a smile on his lips. "Just a little project."

"Anything interesting?"

"Not to you, Mr. Billionaire. It's gonna be an affordable heater that can be made from scraps. For lower income folk, you know?"

(God, could this kid get any more saint-like? When he wasn't hacking into corporations and sassing their owners, of course.)

"That's awesome, kid," Tony said genuinely. He made a mental note to work on more charitable

projects. If the kid could do it, he definitely could. “You gonna get it patented?”

“Nah, I was just planning on releasing a tutorial online, actually. That way more people can access it.”

“Smart move,” Tony said. Peter smiled. “Your foster dad must be proud.”

Peter’s smile disappeared within a millisecond, replaced by something akin to longing. Tony’s heart ached. He recognized that look.

“Yeah, he is,” Peter said. Tony didn’t have to be a super-spy to know that he was lying. The man probably didn’t even know about his kid’s projects.

“Does he know that you’re here for the night?” Tony asked, against his better judgement. The topic of foster fathers was clearly uncomfortable for the both of them, but Tony didn’t particularly feel like being charged with kidnapping.

(That, or he wanted to know more about Peter’s home life. But the latter would imply that he cared, which was definitively false.)

“Uh- not quite. He’s working a night shift today, so he won’t know that I’m gone. If he knew that I’d gotten mugged he would worry, and he already has a lot going on, y’know?”

(God, this kid.)

“I’m sure that he’d prefer to know, kiddo.” If Tony was a father, he would definitely want to know. Not that he would ever be a father.

“It’s fine,” Peter said. He gave Tony a look that seemed to say ‘drop it, or I’m kicking you out.’ A look that he knew very well from Pepper.

(Besides, it wasn’t his place to judge Peter’s situation. Their relationship was strictly intern/boss, maybe mentor/mentee on a good day.)

“Okay. Dr. Cho said you could be discharged first thing in the morning tomorrow-” he paused and glanced at his watch, “-or today, I guess. That sound okay?”

“That’ll work,” Peter said, “are we still set for lab-day next Friday?”

“Sure. You can come whenever you want, really,” Tony said. Because he wanted to get out of meetings. Not because he wanted to see the kid more often. Obviously.

“Cool.” Peter’s smile seemed genuine - the kind of smile that made your cheeks dimple and your ears perk upward.

(More hours, more money, he guessed.)

“One condition, though. You *tell me* when you’re about to conk out like a reckless idiot.”

“I like how this implies that it’s going to happen again. Do you really think that little of my self-preservation skills?” Peter asked, clamping a hand to his heart in exaggerated offense. Tony merely raised an eyebrow at him. “Well I didn’t say you were *wrong*, but a little confidence would’ve been nice.”

“Yeah, you’ll get the confidence when you figure out how to go to a hospital when you get *stabbed*.”

“Fair enough,” Peter admitted. Tony rolled his eyes.

“I’m headed up to bed then, kid. You should get some sleep too.”

“Alright, Mr. Stark.” Peter stifled a yawn as Tony got up and made his way to the door. Before Tony could leave, however, he spoke again. “Why were *you* awake, anyway?”

Tony froze. Then, he softened.

“Same reasons as you, Pete.”

He closed the door before Peter had a chance to respond.

Chapter End Notes

Poor Pete and poor Tony. Boy do they both have a lot to process.

In other news, it's finally summer!! And I've actually planned out the rest of this fic. If all goes according to plan, it should end up being 15 chapters. Not too long, but I might make it a series if y'all want <33 Anyway, i'm hanging out with friends today (i know, i have those!!! it's weird) so i might not reply to comments for a bit, but they always make my day!! Love you all, stay safe <33

Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

Peter meets some new friends ;)

Chapter Notes

Happy Thursday!! Exciting news: I got the lovely and talented karate chop (@tanks_are_fluffy) to beta read for me!!! So this chapter is going to be *premium quality*

Anyways, happy reading!

TW: None this chapter, i think :)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Peter was always happiest on patrol. Be it helping old ladies cross the road or bringing down drug rings, it always gave him a sense of purpose. When he was helping others, he felt like his life was worthwhile.

(Peter would unpack that if he could ever afford therapy.)

That being said, sometimes it still sucked. This particular night his side was killing him, probably because he had only been released from the med-bay two days ago. But the city needed him, and so he did his best to protect it.

The highlight of the night was, of course, receiving a churro from a vaguely threatening old woman that he had helped cross the street. He almost forgot to thank her, his mind clouded with relief. The sugar was exactly what he needed to finish up the night.

By three AM, though, he was entirely beat. Literally and metaphorically. Covered in bruises, he downed a protein bar from his backpack and laid down for the night on his favorite secluded rooftop. It was almost getting too cold to tough it out without shelter, but Peter was determined to stay away from Hadley's house for as long as possible. The less often he slept there, the less annoyed Mr. Hadley would be. If he annoyed his foster father too much, he would get kicked out. He really didn't need that right now.

(That, and the man was *really fucking annoying* . Peter had to put up with enough assholes already. He'd take a speck of frostbite over putting up with Hadley any night.)

With his backpack hugged to his chest and his only coat draped over his body, Peter let himself drift asleep. Tomorrow, he had decided that he was going to test Mr. Stark's open invitation. He knew that there was a distinct possibility that he would lose the internship entirely by showing up unannounced, but he needed more hours if he was going to get enough money to get his weight up. For now, though, he needed to let his body rest.

(If for some reason thoughts of the internship managed to keep his nightmares at bay, then nobody had to know.)

Peter hated waking up in the cold. The numbness in his toes made him crave some hot coffee, which he did not have enough money to waste on. The trilling of his alarm grinded against his sensitive ears, and Peter reluctantly stumbled to his feet and brushed off his jeans.

(As much as he tried to deny it, Peter was still a teenager, and he *hated* mornings.)

Peter almost tripped multiple times as he scaled the wall into the shadowy alley. He was tired, hungry, and cold - not the best combination for an already angsty teenager. Still, he made it to school and dozed through the majority of the morning. It wasn't like he didn't already know everything they were teaching.

Roger Harrington sighed as he watched Peter drop his head onto his desk within minutes of the bell ringing. His best friend, Ned, attempted to arrange a pencil in his hand, but it was more for routine than an attempt at evading punishment. Like the majority of the faculty, Roger knew that Peter's homelife was troubled, so he always let him sleep. God knows he was far more qualified to teach the class than him, anyway.

Roger had watched the kid transform from a bouncy, enthusiastic Freshman to an apathetic, exhausted Junior. He hated to see his potential wasting away, and even more he hated the fact that there was absolutely nothing that he could do about it. Not that he hadn't tried, of course.

The other students had noticed the shifting of his gaze by this point, and the entire room's attention turned to Peter Parker. Mr. Harrington silently thanked whatever God was out there that Flash wasn't in this class. The other teens merely looked upon Peter with pity. They had all watched the same transformation that he had, afterall.

Mr. Harrington continued teaching, and Peter continued sleeping until Ned glanced at his watch and began to nudge him awake. Sure enough, the bell rang one minute later. Ned grabbed Peter's backpack over one shoulder and his own over the other, leading the sleepy genius into the hall.

Roger Harrington sighed, and sat back down at his desk. If he put a few extra dollars in Peter's lunch account, then nobody had to know.

Peter drifted through the rest of the day, with the only notable event being lunch. He didn't remember depositing money into his school account, but he shrugged it off and used the money for an extra slice of greasy cafeteria pizza. This left him with a sumtotal of \$0, but it was worth it for the energy. He was going to need it if he wanted the courage to barge in on Mr. Stark that afternoon.

Peter left as soon as the final bell rang, bidding a quick goodbye to Ned (and MJ, who had somehow managed to appear out of thin air, as usual - Peter wasn't entirely convinced that *he* was the one with superpowers.)

Before he could talk himself out of it, he opened up his map-app and set a course for Stark Tower in Manhattan. It was a long subway ride with a few miles of walking, but nothing that he couldn't manage. Nothing that Spider-Man couldn't manage.

Peter did indeed make it to Stark Tower, though it was almost 5PM. That made the intrusion even more risky, since it was probably already past work hours, but he had walked too far to give up now. Peter walked inside and scanned his card on the elevator door. Sure enough, he was let in.

"Good evening, Mr. Parker," Friday greeted. "Where can I take you?"

"Hi, Friday, Mr. Stark said it was okay if I stopped by on other days, so I was just gonna-" Peter began, before cutting himself off mid-ramble. "-y'know what? Can you just take me to Mr. Stark, please, if he wouldn't mind that?"

“Of course, Mr. Parker,” Friday replied. If it was possible for an AI to sound comforting, Friday was certainly making an effort. “I’m sure the Boss will be happy to see you.”

Peter slouched with relief and leaned back against the wall of the elevator. He loved the movement of it, when he really let himself feel the elevator. He could imagine the gears turning in perfect harmony, all to push him from one floor to the next. He watched the numbers tick by.

Floor 90

Floor 91

Floor 92

Floor 93

Floor 94- wait a minute.

The lab was on floor 92, unless Peter’s usually-adept memory was suddenly failing him.

Floor 95

Floor 96

Peter’s heart began to race. Was Friday malfunctioning? Was he going to keep shooting up through the roof of the tower, like in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*? What would they even write on his gravestone? *Peter Parker, 2001-2017 - did not specify which floor for the elevator to bring him to.*

The elevator pinged and drew to a stop. Floor 98. The penthouse. Tony must be at the penthouse. Peter wiped his sweaty palms against his jeans and took a deep breath.

Then, the elevator door opened, and Peter was faced with a room full of avengers. All looking straight at him.

He rubbed his eyes. Man, this was one wild dream.

(It was not, in fact, a dream.)

“Hey, kid, stopping by for some labtime?” Tony asked, seemingly relieved for the distraction. Even Peter could tell that he was holding himself as if he were in imminent danger.

“Uh, yeah, but I can go, if-”

“Nonsense, Pete,” Tony said, giving him a look that seemed to shout ‘*save me.*’ “Everyone, this is my intern, Peter Parker. Peter, this is... everyone.”

Peter waved awkwardly, shifting his weight back and forth between his feet. Unknowingly, he spun the web shooter on his left wrist. Across the room, the Black Widow narrowed her eyes and the Winter Soldier tilted his head ever so slightly.

“Alright, well, Peter and I are gonna go and get some work done,” Tony announced, slinging an arm around Peter’s shoulders. “If you need anything, Friday can help you.”

“Tony, I really think-” Captain America began, but Tony shushed him with a wave of his hand. Only Peter noticed the tremor in his arm.

“Later, Cap. Lab-time is non-negotiable.”

The captain deflated, and Tony led Peter into the elevator before anyone else had time to protest. Friday complied, closing the door so fast that Peter could feel the rush of air against his ankles. As soon as they were alone, Tony relaxed, steadying himself against the elevator wall.

“Okay, excuse my language, but *what the fuck just happened?* ” Peter asked. He crossed his arms in an effort to channel his inner-MJ and look commanding, but it only succeeded in making him look like an indignant koala that had only been given two raspberries.

(I mean, come on, three raspberries is the absolute minimum, Peter thought.)

“Well, the accords were amended,” Tony admitted. He sighed.

“Yeah, I got that much. *Why* were they amended? Why are they *here* ?”

“Because it was this or prison. And not the cushy type of prison. Trust me, I’m not happy with this arrangement either.”

“So they just live here now?” Peter asked, still skeptical. On one hand, it was the *Avengers* , but on the other hand, Tony had looked terrified of them. And if Tony was scared of something, Peter figured it had to be pretty fucking petrifying.

“Yes, and we’re not talking about it. How ‘bout we work on that macgyver heater you were building?”

Peter grinned.

With a smile on his face and \$40 in his pocket, Peter bounced through the lobby of Stark Tower and out onto the sidewalk. It was too late for him to catch any form of public transportation, but he had been planning to patrol anyway, and an extra half-hour of swinging would make no difference to him.

He was just scoping out the surrounding alleys to find somewhere to change - the light of the Tower making it easy for his enhanced eyes to scour the entire area - when he felt a hand on his shoulder. Peter spun around, fully prepared for a confrontation. Instead, he was met with Natasha Romanoff herself, the Black Widow.

“Here, you left this in Stark’s lab,” she said, handing him his security badge. Peter could’ve sworn that he had clipped it to his backpack, but he wasn’t about to complain.

“Oh, thank you, Ms. Black Widow Ma’am,” he said.

“No problem, kid,” she replied with a knowing smirk. “Have a good night, Spider-Man.”

By the time that Peter processed what she had just said, the Black Widow was nowhere to be seen.

- Later that night -

Tony marched into the penthouse living room, his hands curled into tight fists. He cleared his throat, though the entire room’s attention was already laser focused onto him.

“You all can mess with me however you like,” he began, the tips of his fingernails biting into his palms, “but if you go anywhere near that kid, I will rain all hell down on you. I have forgiven everything that you have done to me, but the moment that one of you even *looks* at Peter wrong, you will find yourselves on the Raft, and I will not have an ounce of regret.”

Without waiting for a response, Tony strode out of the room.

“Wow,” Clint said, once he was sure that the billionaire was out of earshot. “Is anyone else getting dad vibes?”

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading! Also - over 1000 kudos??? Y'all are gonna make me explode. My grave will list all of your usernames. But thank you! <3

Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

In which Peter speaks to a spider ;)

Chapter Notes

Hiya hi, happy Thursday!! Pretty short chapter this week, but next weeks will make up for it ;)

Thank you to my wonderfully amazing beta, kangaroo. You're making the quality of this fic multiply exponentially, bro <3

Anyway, happy reading, and I hope you enjoy!

TW: allusions to hunger and neglect.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Believe it or not, Peter was not naive enough to think that he could keep his identity a secret forever. Instead, he just chose to ignore the possibility for as long as he reasonably could. Despite his worries, as soon as Ned discovered his identity things became more organized.

(Having a ‘guy in the chair’ could be useful from time to time, apparently.)

After school one day, under the guise of homework, the teens created a contingency plan in the event that someone discovered Peter’s identity. They called it ‘code-spaghetti,’ solely because Ned had been hungry.

So, as soon as Peter was a reasonable distance away from the tower, he texted Ned that they had a code spaghetti. Of course, he got a call within seconds.

“Dude, what the hell,” Ned began, before quickly gathering himself. “How bad? Has it reached the internet?”

“It’s only one person,” Peter reassured him, still shaken.

“Oh thank god-”

“But that one person happens to be the Black Widow.”

For a second, Ned was silent. Peter was about to check his signal, when he spoke up again.

“Peter, what even *is* your life at this point?”

“I have no clue, bro. But what are we gonna do?” Peter asked. He knew that Ned could be innocent and often got distracted, but he was a genius before all that, and he was 100% loyal to Peter. The exact type of person that he needed.

“I don’t know, man. One sec, let me get the plan.” There was the distinct sound of papers rustling as Ned searched for the semi-hidden plan. They had decided that they could play it off as roleplay if Mrs. Leeds decided to search Ned’s room, so they hadn’t spent too much time concealing it.

“Aha! I got it!” Ned cheered. “Okay, okay, so we want the ‘singular individual at risk of revealing to the public’ section, right?”

To be honest, Peter wasn’t sure. He didn’t *think* that Natasha would betray him, but there was the distinct possibility of her telling Tony. Surely there must be some kind of spider-solidarity though, right? Regardless, Peter told Ned to go ahead.

“It says here to... threaten the individual...”

“Ned, this is *the Black Widow*”

“Blackmail them with a secret of their own,” Ned continued.

“The *Black Widow* . I don’t think *she* knows her secrets.”

“Or to swear them to secrecy.”

“Ned, this is useless!” Peter whisper-shouted, trying to look inconspicuous as he leaned against a building.

“Hey, you wrote it with me!” Ned protested. “And I don’t think we planned for Natasha freaking Romanoff to find you out!”

“We really should have.”

“Well I know that *now* . God, what if she’s watching you right now? What if she’s watching *me* ? Has she seen me changing? I don’t-”

“Ned, chill, she’s not watching you. I doubt she’s even watching *me* . I just forgot to take my shooters off, and I guess she didn’t mistake them for weird bracelets like the rest of the population.”

“Fuck, man,” Ned sighed. “Is there anything we can do?”

“I mean, it’s the Black Widow. She could snap both of our spines with her pinky finger,” Peter reasoned. “I say we just wait and see, unless you have any better ideas.”

“Yeah, I think you’re right,” Ned agreed reluctantly. “You headed home?”

Peter cringed. Ned knew that he was in foster care, of course, but he didn’t know anything about Mr. Hadley. Peter had managed to skillfully redirect the conversation every time that the topic arose, something that Ned seemed to remain oblivious to. It’s not that he didn’t *want* to tell him - god knows it’d be nice to crash at his place every so often - but he couldn’t give him that burden to bear.

He had been lucky enough to be able to stay at Midtown High with his first placement. If Ned tattled, then he might end up across the state. That couldn’t happen. It wasn’t an option.

“Yeah,” Peter lied reluctantly. “Don’t want Mr. Hadley to worry.”

“Right. I should get to bed soon too. Try and take a break from patrol for the night. You need it,” Ned said, ever the mother-hen. “I’ll see you tomorrow, yeah?”

“Yep. See you then, Ned.”

Peter imagined Ned smiling as he hung up the phone. Peter often wished that he could confide in his best friend about some of the darker aspects of his life, but Ned was too happy. Too innocent. His view of Peter’s life was so perfect that he didn’t want to sour it.

(Besides, maybe if he listened to Ned for long enough, that idealistic life could become a reality. You never know.)

Still, Peter missed Ned’s voice in his ear as he walked through the crowded streets. It was a cool, cloudy night; only a taste of what the colder months would bring. Usually he stayed at his foster home more often during the winter, which only made his life more miserable. For now, though, he was perfectly happy to crash in an abandoned building or on a concealed rooftop.

Sure, none of his options were great, but he survived. He was Spider-Man, afterall. Surviving was kinda his thing.

(Too bad for Peter Parker. He’d just have to tough it out.)

The next day flew by in a haze of school and work. The only parts clear in his memory were his meals; a granola bar that he had gotten when he woke up, part of Ned and MJ’s lunches, and a sandwich that he had carefully budgeted for with his internship money.

The afternoon was spent hacking, which managed to rake him in an extra twenty bucks, straight to his bank account. Honestly, he couldn’t remember most of it. He found himself wishing that he could go to the lab and hangout with Mr. Stark. For the money, of course. Just the money.

It wasn’t until patrol that his day got interesting. Wednesday nights tended to be somewhat dull, so Peter was relatively relaxed until the hairs on the back of his neck prickled ever so slightly. It wasn’t alerting him to imminent danger so much as warning him of a potential future threat, but Peter snapped to attention nonetheless. Nine times out of ten, this kind of warning meant that he

was being watched.

(Peter didn't like being watched. It made him self conscious, which in turn made him sloppy. With his job, he couldn't afford to be sloppy.)

Making the executive decision to figure out the disturbance before the warning progressed, Peter swung onto an empty rooftop, landing perfectly in his trademark crouch.

(Okay, maybe he wouldn't mind so much if someone had been watching that. Stunts that are that good deserved to be observed.)

Still, his spidey-sense only heightened. Someone was still nearby.

"Hello?" Peter called, scanning the rooftop. "Whoever you are, I know you're watching me. Come talk to me, and maybe I can help you."

"Actually, I think you *can* help me," responded a cool, velvety voice. A woman stepped into view from the shadows of the roof, seemingly materializing from thin air. At the sight of her long, red hair, Peter's heart dropped. "I was looking for an arachnid. Spider to spider chat, you know?"

(Oh, *shit*. Peter probably should've seen this coming.)

"You're not gonna tell Mr. Stark, are you?" Peter asked before he could stop himself. "Be-because I have an army of spiders that bend to my will-" *Where the fuck did that even come from, Parker?* "-and I think that it'd be a really bad idea for you to... uh... cross me."

(Did that count as a threat? Eh, Peter thought, close enough to make Ned proud.)

To Peter's dismay, however, the Black Widow merely chuckled, like one would after spotting a puppy tripping on its own tail.

"Relax, kid. I'm not gonna spill your secret," she said, still somewhat amused. "This, though, we need to work on."

“*This?*”

“Being intimidating.”

“I’ll have you know that I can be perfectly intimidating, when I... when I want to be. I was just, uh, testing you. Yeah, that’s right. Testing you,” Peter stammered. He was very thankful for his mask.

“Sure, паук [spider]. If you need me, call,” Natasha said. “You know how to reach me.”

Before Peter could even attempt to clarify that statement, the Widow was gone, disappearing as fast as she had arrived.

“What the fuck was that supposed to mean?” Peter muttered to himself, sitting down on the roof. “Holy shit, I gotta tell Ned!”

Chapter End Notes

Wow wow, Peter has gained himself a spider <3 Feel free to yell at me on [tumblr](#) (@liviagracey). Love you, and stay safe!

Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

In which Peter has a bad day... as usual.

Chapter Notes

Hiya hi here is a chapter! Lots of angst today - I apologise in advance :)

TW: Grief, I guess?

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Sometimes Peter really missed May and Ben. Well, that was a lie. He always missed them. But sometimes the missing graduated from its usual dull ache into a ravenous pain, devouring him from the inside out.

On these days, there was nothing that Peter could do except stare into space and reminisce. He chose a nice park bench and sat with his knees pulled to his chest. He texted Ned a vague explanation which by some stroke of luck he seemed to believe.

He could have told the truth, but if Ned knew that it was a Bad Day, he would worry. Plus Peter didn't want to talk to anyone, anyway.

Unfortunately that plan was foiled when his phone rang at about 9AM. Peter would've just ignored it, but he knew that only people he had allowed could make it through his firewalls. That meant that it was either Ned, MJ, or Mr. Hadley.

"Hey," Peter croaked, picking up the phone. His voice was forced, and he almost choked on the words.

"Why the fuck aren't you at school?"

(Ah. Mr. Hadley it was, then.)

“What do you care?” Peter grumbled. Usually the school didn’t call for a singular absence, but he must have missed too many days this quarter. Fuck.

“I *care* because CPS is gonna call bullshit if you miss too much school. I had to feed them some nonsense about your delinquency. I didn’t sign up for improv,” Hadley snapped. Peter inhaled sharply.

“I won’t skip again,” he conceded. “Want anything else?”

“Yeah, get your ass home. Place could use a clean, and you owe me.”

Peter knew better to argue, by now. He needed CPS off his back, and Hadley was the only way. “I’ll get it done,” he said, too exhausted to argue. At least he could get some warmth for a while.

“You better. I’ll be home at 5, and I expect a pristine house. I could get a lower maintenance foster kid very easily, you know?”

Peter gulped. “Yes, Mr. Hadley.”

There went his day of moping, he supposed, burying his head in his knees. Though before he could gather the energy to get up, a man sat down next to him, morning sun reflecting off of his hand.

(*Wait, how did the sun reflect off of a hand? Oh. Oh shit* , Peter thought. *That’s Bucky fucking Barnes.*)

Peter was just about to execute his flawless plan of running away before Bucky could see his face, when the super-soldier spoke.

“You good there, kid?”

Well, fuck. Peter hummed an affirmation. His voice wasn’t all that recognizable, but Mr. Barnes was a spy, and Peter didn’t really want to talk anyway.

“Wait, you’re Stark’s kid, aren’t you?”

Shit .

Peter kept his head firmly lodged in his knees.

“Intern,” he muttered. On second thoughts, that might have sounded annoyed or bitter, but Peter was just glad to have spoken at all.

“Course,” Bucky agreed, still sounding skeptical. “Want me to call him?”

“No,” Peter said quickly. “I mean, no thank you. I should get to, uh, get to school.”

He left before Bucky could say anything else, relying on the assumption that the ex-assassin couldn’t risk chasing a kid in public with his already fragile reputation.

(Hopefully, Bucky wouldn’t notice that he was walking in the opposite direction of Midtown High.)

By the time that the entire house was clean, Peter felt ready to collapse. Instead, he went to the graveyard. It had been too long since he’d paid a visit to his family, and keeping moving was the only way he would be able to avoid a full blown shut down.

The Parker section of the graveyard was quite quaint, but it was all his family had been able to afford. His mom and dad’s graves lay side by side with May and Ben’s across from them, separated by a walkway. Peter figured that when he died, he would be placed connecting them, like the header of a table.

(Not that he planned to join them anytime soon. They’d given too much for him to waste his life.)

As was tradition, Peter went to his mom and dad first. Ben had decided against putting the 'beloved mother, sister, etc' nonsense on their stones. He figured that anyone worth anything would already know that. They had simple stones, instead.

Mary Teresa Parker, 1966-2005

Richard Laurence Parker, 1964-2005

Peter had carried through the tradition for his aunt and uncle, since it was one of the few choices he was allowed to make. There was no money for a proper funeral, but a few of Ben's work friends had shown up for the burial anyway. They had patted Peter on his shoulder as the bodies were lowered into the ground.

(It did nothing to ease the pain, but Peter appreciated it nonetheless.)

Peter wished he had flowers for his family, but he didn't have the money to spare. He knew that they would all want him to save his money anyway, not that it made him feel much better.

To make things better, rain soon started pelting down on Peter, like some kind of dramatic movie. It wasn't the warm, summer rains, either. It was the December rain that soaked through your clothes and left you shivering for days. Peter hated that kind of rain.

He leaned against a nearby tree and watched the graves. He had never been one for talking to gravestones - all he could imagine were the bones and decaying flesh underneath, after all - but it felt nice to watch them every so often.

(It wasn't logical, but grief never is, as Peter had come to understand.)

He was interrupted by his phone ringing for the second time of the day. Assuming it was Ned, calling to check in, he picked it up without even glancing at the caller ID.

"Ned?" he croaked, not bothering to make his voice more stable. Ned knew better than to question it.

"Man, you sound like shit, kid."

(Well, that wasn't Ned. Unless Ned's voice had gotten deeper overnight. I mean, puberty can be weird, he thought.)

"Not Ned?" Peter asked hesitantly. He was too tired to think through what he was saying.

"It's Tony, kid, though I prefer 'not Ned' to Mr. Stark, I guess."

Oh, shit. Peter probably should've guessed that. Only someone as smart as Tony could have gotten through his firewalls.

"Oh," he said. His brain was fuzzy with a mixture of grief, hunger, exhaustion, and cold - probably enough reasons for him to give himself a break from sounding human.

"Yeah, *oh* . You've got some pretty strong firewalls. Not too bad, for a kid."

"How'd you even get my number?" Peter asked.

"Had Friday pick it up," Tony said. "Yeah, yeah, creepy, I know. Anyway, I'm all booked on Friday with accords nonsense, so I was wondering if you'd wanna come to the lab today instead?"

"Oh," Peter said. He considered turning him down, but he could use the money and warmth. Maybe Mr. Stark would even get him some food. "Sure. I can be there in, uh, whenever the next subway is."

"I'll have Hap come and pick you up," Tony amended. "Where are you?"

"I can be outside the school in five minutes."

"Sounds good, kiddo. I'll have Happy meet you there."

He hung up before Peter could even say thank you. Getting hung up on was becoming a recurring

theme, it seemed. He checked his phone. 5PM. Hopefully that meant it would be about dinner-time when he got there.

Peter brushed himself off and stumbled to his feet, just about keeping himself steady. He smiled, and made his way to school - a sentence he never thought he would even *think*.

He was looking forward to the internship though.

For the money and warmth, of course.

No ulterior motive.

“Wow, Tony wasn’t kidding when he said that you sounded shitty,” Happy said as he pulled up to the abandoned school drop-off zone. Peter would’ve protested, but he currently looked like a half-drowned muskrat with daddy issues, so Happy wasn’t exactly wrong.

“Thanks for the ride, Mr. Happy,” Peter muttered, opting to ignore the comment.

“Yeah, yeah. Just don’t get the seats wet.”

Peter grimaced. He was definitely about to get the seats wet. Luckily, he couldn’t bring himself to care.

He managed to zone out through most of the ride, relishing in the warmth. If he had been paying more attention, he would’ve seen Happy shooting a text to Tony, telling him to be ready for an angsty fish-child. As it was, he was happily oblivious until they pulled up to the tower.

Tony, who was conveniently waiting by the elevator, took one look at him and sighed. Peter cringed. As much as it was warranted, he didn’t want pity.

“Jesus, kid, how long were you out there?” Tony asked. Peter couldn’t tell if his tone was

concerned, pitying, or annoyed.

“Uh, I dunno, a few hours?”

“In this storm? Come on, let’s get you some dry clothes. You’re gonna catch your death in this.”

“Oh, it’s okay, sir,” Peter said. A few dark spots danced across his vision, but he quickly blinked them away. “We can go right to the lab if you want.”

(He knew his body was close to its limits, but he could keep pushing. He had to keep pushing.)

Tony raised his eyebrows. “Kid, no offense, but you look like death.”

“No offense, but us young’uns are just more resilient than you, old man,” Peter joked weakly as Tony led him into the elevator. It was a lie, of course, but he hoped it’d take some of the tension off.

“Nope, no distracting me with humor, you little shit. You’re clearly not in any state for labtime.” Peter’s heart sank. Because he needed the money, of course.

“Okay, I can just-”

“Nuh-uh, no opinions from hypothermic genius-children. We’re getting you warm clothes, hot chocolate, and then you’re gonna be my buffer for Avengers movie night,” Tony announced. Peter blanched.

“I... what?” he asked.

“I need someone to stop me from killing the rogues, did you know that Clint likes to pelt people with popcorn? Yeah, it gets old real fast.”

Oh. A deal. Peter could understand that. Hot chocolate for a social buffer.

(It was a good deal. A great deal, even. So why did it make him sad?)

“Right, yeah,” he said, mustering up all the enthusiasm he could. “Wouldn’t want him to break your old man knees, after all.”

It was a weak joke, but Tony snorted, so it must have done the trick. Before he could retort, though, the elevator pulled to a stop at an unfamiliar floor - Tony’s floor, as he soon realized. Tony dashed out, and Peter trailed behind him like a lost puppy.

Soon enough, he was back in the elevator, swaddled in fresh Stark Industries merch and an oversized MIT hoodie. It smelled like motor oil, something that used to bother Peter, but now just smelt like home.

(like Tony)

They looked like quite a pair as they walked into the penthouse. Peter’s hair was dripping wet - water still running down his forehead - and Tony was rambling about some technology that he was too tired to understand. Of course, the moment that they walked in, all eyes turned to face them.

“Right. Petey here got caught in the storm, so he’s joining us for movie night,” Tony announced. Peter briefly wondered why Tony had invited him over at all if he knew that they were watching a movie, but he brushed it off. He probably hadn’t planned on attending at all. By the look on the Avengers’ faces, this was a reasonable assumption.

“Peter, why don’t you go and call your foster dad and see if you can stay the night? We’ve got plenty of guest rooms, and it’d be a little precarious to get you home in this weather,” Miss Potts said from her position on an armchair.

Not knowing what else to do, Peter nodded and pulled out his phone obediently. He leaned against the wall, and pretended to dial a number.

“Uh, hi dad,” he mumbled awkwardly. “I was wondering if I could stay over at my internship tonight... ‘cause of the storm and all.” Peter paused as if he were listening to a response. He could still feel eyes on him, though some of the crowd had returned to debating the movie. “Really? Awesome. I’ll see you tomorrow.”

Maybe the conversation was too short, but Peter hoped it would be convincing enough. After awkwardly wandering back over to the others, he found an appropriately distanced seat and curled in on himself to the sound of the movie, sipping at the hot chocolate that Tony had given him.

His presence alone seemed to stop most of the arguing, which was a relief since Peter wasn't sure how he was supposed to be a mediator. Instead, the Avengers merely exchanged a few hostile glances. Some of them even tried to talk to him.

If Peter were more naive, he might almost have thought that they cared about him.

(It was nice anyway, just to have the illusion of love.)

“So,” Natasha began, leaning across the counter until her breath was hot on Bucky’s nose. “What do you think the deal is with Stark’s kid?”

“Well he’s Spider-Man, that much is clear,” Bucky said.

“Obviously. There’s more going on though.”

“I know. Usually my hearing would have picked up on the other half of his phone call, but I got nothing,” Bucky mused. “He’s a foster kid, right?”

“Yeah, since he was twelve,” Natasha confirmed.

“You know the stats, I assume?”

“Of course I know the stats. I lived the stats.”

Bucky nodded, taking a sip from his glass.

“What d’you say we catch a spider, then?” He asked, tilting his head a little.

“Not yet,” Natasha said. “For now, we wait.”

“We watch and we wait,” Bucky confirmed.

“We’re not called super-spies for nothing, are we?” With a smirk, Natasha left.

Chapter End Notes

Woot woot! The support I've gotten on this fic is still completely blowing me away, so thank you again lol. This chapter was brought to you by my incredible beta, who is also going to see Black Widow with me tomorrow in the middle of a hurricane <3 it's very exciting. Anyway, I hope you enjoyed, come yell at me on tumblr

Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

In which everyone is generally not having a good time.

Chapter Notes

Voila, chapter! Not too long this week, since I was swamped with dog work - moral of the story, if you want longer chapters, spay and neuter your dogs!! Thank you to my beautiful and talented beta for the edit, as always <33

TW: Bullying, etc.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Peter woke up the next morning to the sound of laughter. Immediately, he sprung up, reaching for his backpack - it had become instinct to protect what little he owned. Instead of clasping the familiar, worn strap of his bag, however, he found a blanket.

How-

Oh. He had slept at the tower. With the Avengers. Who were all looking at him now.

(Maybe Ned was right. What even *was* his life at this point.)

“Oh, uh, hi,” Peter muttered. “I didn’t do anything *too* embarrassing last night, did I?”

“What, you don’t remember the glitter fight?” Tony asked, raising an eyebrow mischievously. Peter paled. “Joking, joking,” the man quickly clarified, “you just went to sleep.”

Clint - *Hawkeye* - nodded in confirmation. “Yeah, kid,” he said with a smirk, “the only thing you missed was Mr. Iron-emotions going full dad mode.”

Peter snorted. “*Iron emotions* ? You haven’t seen him when he’s in trouble with Pep.”

“Oh, I like you,” Clint said, giggling.

“ *I* don’t,” Tony grumbled.

“Yeah, yeah. Thanks for letting me stay the night, but I gotta get to school,” Peter said. He grabbed his backpack from across the room, and swung it over his shoulder before anyone could protest. “Bye guys! Nice to properly meet you!”

Peter practically flew into the elevator, and the Avengers were left spluttering and speechless in the wake of the hurricane that was Peter Benjamin Parker.

(Peter was pretty happy with that one, if he was honest. Leaving people utterly confounded was his personal favorite pastime.)

Tony wasn’t surprised by Peter’s quick exit, but he was far from pleased. As much as he hated to admit it, he was worried about the kid, and from the look of the rest of the avengers, the sentiment was shared.

“Tony, why the hell does your intern look about ten inches from death?” Clint asked abruptly. Tony sighed and pinched the bridge of his nose.

“You’re the spy here, Barton,” he said. “If you find out what’s up with him, let me know.”

“Is that really responsible, Tony?” Steve asked, ever the voice of reason. The pure compassion in his voice made Tony want to rip into his ears.

“No, Rogers. Got any better ideas?” he snapped. Steve took a step back, shrinking like a kicked puppy. “Sorry, sorry. Trust me, I’m far more worried about him than you are, but the whole internship is a new development. I can’t quite ask him why he was freezing his ass off in the rain on a Thursday afternoon. Not yet, at least.”

Sam stepped forward cautiously. “I don’t mean to be abrupt, Tony, but isn’t this a situation for CPS?” he posited. Tony barely knew Sam and wasn’t inclined to get angry at him, but he was dangerously close to the end of his tether.

“Look, it’s great that you’re all concerned, but I have this handled. I’m not going to upturn his entire life after a singular evening. Now, if you’ll excuse me, I have some work to do.”

Tony didn’t give them a chance to respond before he stormed out of the room and down to his lab.

“Boss,” rang out Friday’s clear voice, “I regret to inform you that I have had to activate protocol ‘Boss Baby,’ due to a prolonged lab-session amid emotional distress. Ms. Potts has been alerted and will arrive shortly.”

“And remind me why I decided to make that protocol, Fri?” Tony asked, his voice wrought with exasperation.

“You didn’t, Boss. Ms. Potts did.”

“That I did,” Pepper announced as she sidled into the lab. “Thank you, Friday.”

“It is my pleasure, Pepper.”

“Now, Tony, why are you holing up in the lab again? It’s been a while, actually. I thought we were making progress.”

Tony sighed deeply. He hated being emotionally vulnerable, even with Pep. “It’s nothing, I’m just worried about the kid.”

“Because he turned up soaked to the bone last night?” Pepper said.

“That, and he never mentions his Foster Dad. Plus he’s practically a skeleton, and there was the

whole stabbing incident.”

“The *what* ?”

(Oh. Maybe Tony had neglected to inform Pepper of that particular event.)

“Kid just turned up one day and passed out on the table. I took him to Cho, and there was a whole ass stab wound on his side. He said he got mugged, but what kind of kid neglects to tell an adult that they got fucking *stabbed* ?” Tony said. He spoke quicker than most people would have been able to comprehend, but Pepper was a master in the art of handling Tony.

“Okay, Tony, this might sound revolutionary, but I think you need to talk to Peter about this. Tell him that you’re worried, see if you can get him to open up.”

“But Pepper-r-r,” Tony whined, “what if I scare him off? What if I screw it up?”

“By doing nothing you’re definitely gonna screw it up,” Pepper said. “It sounds like this kid needs somebody in his corner. I know you’re scared, but he needs you.”

Tony put down his screwdriver, wiping his hands on his already-oil-stained shirt. He ran his hand up his face and let his palm rest on his forehead, his fingers tangled in his hair.

“God, Pep, how’d I end up caring about a kid?” he asked. Pepper smiled.

“You’re not as iron-hearted as you think, Tones,” she said. “You’ve just gotta let yourself feel. Now c’mon, you can’t hide in here forever, and we have an accords meeting.”

“One min, Pep. I’ll be right up.”

Pepper rolled her eyes. “You better be.”

Finally alone, Tony pulled out his phone and dialed Peter’s number. To make sure he got to school alright, of course.

No ulterior motive.

Peter arrived at school a little late, but by his standards, that was practically on time. He merely waved to the receptionist - a cheerful woman who had given up on hounding Peter down by this point - and ran down the deserted halls to his first class.

Unfortunately, he ran straight into another late student. Even more unfortunately, said student happened to be Eugene “Flash” Thompson.

(Well, shit.)

“Penis? What’re you doing here?” he sneered. “Finally deem this school good enough to grace it with your presence?”

(Surely he hadn’t skipped *that* much school, right? He was there *most* of the time... well, at least a decent portion of the time.)

“I’m just trying to get to class, Flash,” Peter muttered, hoping to avoid a confrontation. He really didn’t need another fight on his resume.

Flash scoffed. “Yeah, it’s not gonna be that easy, Parker. Don’t you go thinking that you can get away with anything just because you’re a hopeless-orphan-charity case, while the rest of us are all working our asses off.”

Peter saw red. If Flash knew anything about his life, he would not be pitying him.

“C’mon,” he mumbled. “It’s not my fault that your parents don’t love you, *Eugene*. ”

“What did you just say to me?”

(Well, whoops. He was in this far now, may as well commit to it.)

Peter cleared his throat. “I *said* , it’s not my fault that your parents don’t love you.”

“You little-”

Peter took that moment to make the responsible decision and get the fuck out of there. Proper attendance could start tomorrow - it wasn’t like Hadley really cared, anyway. Besides, there wouldn’t be a Peter to scold if Flash caught up to him.

Keeping an eye on Flash through the reflection in the hallway floors, Peter twisted and turned, eventually ducking into an empty classroom. By the time that Flash figured out where he had gone, Peter had already pried open a window and crawled onto the streets.

He was in his spidey-suit and swinging through the streets before Flash could even catch his breath. If he wasn’t going to school, he may as well get some midday patrolling in.

Three hours later, exhausted and bruised, he collapsed onto a rooftop for a break. Or, at least, he intended it to be a break until his phone started ringing in his specially built phone pocket.

(The screen still cracked often, but at least he didn’t lose the phone.)

Peter, expecting the call to be from an annoyed Mr. Hadley, picked up the phone without checking the caller ID.

“What is it?” he grumbled upon picking up the phone.

“Wow, I expect disrespect from you, but outright rudeness? I’m shocked, truly,” Tony said, his voice dripping with sarcasm. Peter grinned.

“Well someone has to keep you in your place, right?”

“I have Pep for that, kid. And Rhodey, actually. And Steve,” Tony rambled. “Anyway, I just

wanted to check that you made it to school alright, but given that you're answering your phone, I'll take that as a no."

"Well, in my defense, I did *go* to school," Peter said. "I just left."

"I swear you're going to be the death of me, kid."

"Nah, I think that'll be old age," he taunted. A siren blared in the background, signalling Peter to go back to patrol. "Anyway, gotta go. Nice to speak to you, old man!"

Before Tony had the chance to respond, Peter hung up, cackling quietly to himself. Still, as he swung off, he had to admit that it had been nice to talk to Mr. Stark. Even if only for a minute.

He still wasn't sure why the billionaire had called, though.

He probably wanted to make sure that Peter's delinquency didn't reflect badly on the company, come to think of it. He must have had access to his attendance records.

Oh well, it wasn't like that bothered Peter.

Tony needed Peter to get out of meetings, Peter needed Tony for his money.

No ulterior motives.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading! Come yell at me on [tumblr](#) if you have any questions or whatever!

Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

Hello hello, here is a chapter <3

TWs: Cold, angst, and general misery! Enjoy :)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Peter didn't know when his days had started to become defined by their proximity to lab-time, but it was now an unfortunate truth. Lab-day meant food, afterall. Food, money, and tech. Contact with a human other than Ned was an added bonus, he guessed.

(Not that Ned wasn't great, of course, but Ned was a constant. Sometimes he craved a conversation where he couldn't predict every comment and response.)

Needless to say, by Tuesday Peter was exhausted, tired, cold, and ready for a lab-day. He had been to three days of school in a row, so he decided that he deserved some relief. The invitation to the lab was open, afterall, and Peter needed it.

This time, though, he decided to text Tony before he left. Not only did it seem polite, but it also offered assurance that he wouldn't walk into any awkward situations. Peter might have been a total dumbass, but at least he learned from his mistakes.

PtrParkour: u free for lab time today?

BossMan: You, child, are my savior.

That was a yes.

Pep has a soft spot for you, so I get out of accords bullshit ;)

PtrParkour: cool. be there in 20 A(🐱)>

BossMan: What the fuck is that emoji????

PtrParkour: _(ツ)_/

BossMan: Alright, then.

Despite himself, Peter smiled down at his phone screen and let his shoulders un-tense ever so slightly. Talking to Tony always seemed to have that effect on him, somehow.

(If he closed his eyes, it almost felt like talking to Ben.)

By the time that Peter reached the tower, he was shivering aggressively. It hadn't snowed yet, but the forecast predicted a storm within the next week. That was a problem for Future-Peter, though. Present-Peter was taking things one step at a time.

Friday greeted Peter as cheerily as always, taking him right up to the lab. Sensing Peter's temperature, she offered to turn up the heating a little, which he readily accepted. He had given up on his pride a long time ago, anyway.

Peter tossed his backpack onto the lab's couch, and called out to Tony. Before he could panic about the lack of response, though, Friday spoke up.

"Mr. Parker, if I may intrude, Boss has asked me to inform you that, and I quote, 'mean Miss. Potts has decided to torture him by locking him in the conference room to deal with glorified super-babies.' He will be in the lab shortly."

"Well that sounds like it's going well," Peter muttered under his breath. "Thank you, Friday. I'll just wait here."

"Of course, Mr. Parker."

Peter sat down to tinker with his dumpster-tech, as Tony had taken to calling it. He lasted twenty minutes before he got curious.

(Curiosity had always been Peter's fatal flaw, be it investigating Oscorp's spider exhibit or hacking into Stark Industries.)

"What are they even *doing*?" he wondered aloud.

"If I may, Peter, they are discussing revisions to the accords. Boss is distressed, which I have ascertained is due to the events that transpired in Siberia," Friday offered helpfully.

"What the hell happened in Siberia?"

"I am not at leisure to disclose that information," the AI said. If it was possible for a robot to sound regretful, Friday most certainly did. Luckily, Peter had an idea.

"But, hypothetically, if relevant footage were to play on Tony's laptop - by accident, of course - then it would be unavoidable for me to see it," Peter said. "Just putting that out there."

(*Curiosity killed the cat...*)

"It seems my servers have malfunctioned, Peter," Friday said after a short wait. "You will find Boss's laptop underneath his desk."

(... *But satisfaction brought it back.*)

Peter hustled to the laptop, sitting cross legged on the floor in front of it. The screen came to life without any need for prompting, showing the familiar UI of the Iron Man suit. The one that Tony had worn to Germany.

Immediately, Peter noticed Tony standing over Cap, who was crouched on the ground near Bucky.

"He's my friend," Steve said, sounding almost defeated.

"So was I," Tony deadpanned.

Peter's heart turned to ice as the men fought. His two idols engaged in battle. He knew there had been a fight, but he had never imagined this.

"Stay down, final warning," Iron Man said. Peter held his breath.

"I could do this all day."

(Peter almost laughed at that. The man looked like he was seconds away from collapse, not that he didn't admire the determination.)

Then, faster than Peter could process, Tony was on the ground. He was on the ground, and Steve's shield was slamming into him. Again and again. The Iron Man mask came off, and Steve raised the shield.

Peter's heart stopped when the blue light of the arc reactor dimmed. Friday cut the footage as the Captain helped his friend to his feet.

Logically, Peter knew that Tony was fine now. He was alive, and he was breathing.

His brain, however, thought otherwise.

The familiar storm of his anxiety morphed into an uncontrollable fire of anger. It stirred his stomach and sent chills to the tips of his fingers. He itched to punch someone. He itched to tear that shield into pieces.

Instead, he grabbed his backpack and pushed his rage down to his toes. He needed to get out of that tower before he sent the captain flying into a wall.

"Really an unfortunate glitch, Friday," he said. "I seem to have forgotten an, uh, dentist appointment."

"I apologise if the footage has upset you, Peter, but I calculated that you are the only person

capable of helping me to achieve my primary goal - to ensure the physical and emotional wellbeing of Boss.”

“I know, Friday. I just need to get to my dentist appointment before I break an American icon’s nose.”

“Understood, Mr. Parker. I will ensure that the Boss knows your whereabouts.”

“Thank you, Fri,” Peter said. “ Take me to the exit, please.”

“Of course.”

Peter didn’t even glance at the receptionist as he left, too lost in his own head. He drummed his fist against his thigh as he walked in a vain attempt to keep himself calm. It didn’t help.

Peter went straight back to patrolling as soon as he was calm enough to stop himself from pummeling every bike-thief he saw. The benefit of his anger was that it left him too dissociated to properly feel the cold. Of course, this only lasted until midnight, when the first snowflakes began to fall.

Patrolling kept him moving, but soon Peter knew that it would soon start doing more harm than good. He didn’t have enough money left for food to replace the energy that he would burn, and a hungry spider hibernates sooner than a content one.

(Of course, Peter wouldn’t be content, but he took what he could get.)

Needless to say, soon enough Peter had to cut his losses as hunker down for the night. A thin coating of snow decorated the ground - something that would have once made Peter giddy with excitement but now only filled him with fear. It was depressing, really, how much he had changed.

He found a rooftop with an awning over the staircase into the building, and he curled up against the wall. It was a tight fit, but it gave him cover from the steadily falling snow. Peter knew New

England snowstorms, and by consequence he knew that this was going to be a rough night. He kept his suit over his clothes for warmth.

Peter wondered what Ned and MJ were doing right now. He imagined that Ned would be celebrating the impending snow-day, planning to sleep in until noon and play videogames. MJ would probably be writing to some government representative about climate change, as she always did when it snowed this early in the year.

He missed them.

At least his melancholy pushed away the anger, though. Peter knew how to deal with sadness; in some ways it was comforting to feel the warm, familiar numbness. Rage, on the other hand, was raw and wild. It grew inside of him until it had a life of its own, ripping apart his organs to burst out of his torso. Sadness was softer.

The door opened without warning. Peter scrambled to the top of the awning, sticking to the underside and holding his breath.

Natasha Romanoff and James Buchanan Barnes walked out and looked straight up at him.

Fresh rage warmed Peter, sending bolts of lightning of emotion to his numb fingers. He clenched his hands into fists and dropped to the ground.

“I’m assuming he knows?” Peter asked, eyeing Bucky suspiciously.

“In all fairness, he figured it out himself,” Natasha said in lieu of a response. Peter sighed and pulled off his mask. No point in hiding what was already known.

“So why are you here?” He asked, gripping his mask tightly. He was trying to contain his hostility, but he was beyond exhausted and surrounded by people who were complicit in the near-murder of Mr. Stark.

“Why are *you* here?” Natasha bit back. Bucky stood silently behind her, watching and listening. “Bit cold for fresh air, isn’t it?”

“I’m on patrol,” Peter lied easily. “Waiting here until someone needs rescuing.”

Natasha shook her head, a few stray snowflakes flying away as she did.

“And if you become a spider-popsicle while you’re waiting?” She prompted.

“I’ll go home before that.”

“Right,” Natasha said. Peter didn’t think she was convinced. “Come to the tower. We can get you warmed up, Tony doesn’t have to know.”

“I’ll go home,” Peter said firmly. Maybe he would, at this point. Was it really worth freezing to death just to avoid Mr. Hadley?

“But-” Natasha began, cut off by a hand on her shoulder.

“Let him be, Nat,” Bucky said. He turned to look Peter in the eye. “He can handle himself. You know where to go if you need us.”

Peter looked at the ground. It would be a lot easier to hate Bucky if he was less likeable. He spared a last glance at the spies, both of them staring at him intensely. It felt like they could unravel his secrets with no less than a tap.

“I don’t need you,” Peter said, picturing Steve helping Bucky to his feet, the shield still lodged in the arc reactor. He swung away before either of them could respond.

No matter how cold the night turned out to be, at least his anger would keep him warm.

Chapter End Notes

Uh,,, sorry?

Okay okay, I know it seems like Peter is getting to know Tony very fast, but a) I'm too

lazy to write more bonding, b) my version of Peter hasn't been cared for for a long time. It's natural that when Mr. Stark shows him basic human decency, he will latch onto him.

Peter sees the Civil-War in black and white here - his dad versus the people who almost killed him. I see it differently, but that's not what's important here. Peter is already exhausted and falling apart, and watching people hurt the one person that has shown him parental affection is the last straw.

Friday didn't know this, of course. She just wanted to help her boss.

Anyway, thank you for reading and I hope you have an epic day! :) <33

Chapter 12

Chapter Summary

In which... I wrote this a while ago so idk really but something happens

Chapter Notes

Voila, another chapter :) I was working on my tumblr yesterday, so feel free to come [yell at me](#) <3

TW: Everyone's just kinda not having a good time. You get it by this point.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“Well, we were right,” Bucky said, leaning against the kitchen counter in the dead of night, his arms crossed against his chest. “There’s definitely something going on with that kid.”

Natasha slipped into her favorite stool, and took a sip of her wine. “Obviously. It’s a question of *what* .”

“The kid doesn’t wanna go home, that’s what. Why else would he be hanging out - literally - on a rooftop in the dead of night? It would make way more sense to keep swinging around, or whatever he does.”

“There was something else wrong today,” Natasha stated. “He was angry. At us, I think.”

“Could it be because I figured out his identity?” Bucky suggested.

“No.”

“Alright,” Bucky said. He knew better than to argue with Nat. “What else, then?”

“I don’t know. The clear thing is that he’s not going home tonight, and that storm isn’t easing up anytime soon.”

“Are you suggesting we go after him?”

“No, that would just chase him away,” Natasha said. She took another sip of wine, her eyes ever so slightly glazed over. “I’m suggesting we tail him. Not today, not when he’s watching for us, but soon. He won’t survive an entire winter on the streets.”

“I thought you said he’d been in foster care since he was young, surely there have been worse winters than this?” Bucky said.

“Not since he got his powers. Spiders can’t thermoregulate.”

“Right,” Bucky said. He reached into the fridge and pulled out a beer. “So, we tail him.”

“Tomorrow?” Natasha suggested.

“Tomorrow,” Bucky agreed.

Ever since he was little, Peter had felt a degree of separation between himself and the world around him. There was *them* , and then there was *him* . Poor little Peter Parker, not like the rest.

Peter’s parents always told him that he lived in his own little world, and his aunt and uncle continued the tradition after they were gone. Even now, teachers preached that he couldn’t keep getting lost in his head. The ironic thing was that he was too far away to even hear them.

On good days, he was alert and functional. Bad days left him on the edge of unresponsive. It was a defense mechanism, in a way. When he was in his head, the rest of the world couldn’t affect him.

After a night spent sleeping in a snowstorm - curled up in what little shelter he could find, like a true spider - it was fair to say that Peter was far gone from society. He inhabited a haze of math and science and vague revenge plots against the rogues; the only world he understood.

Somehow, Peter got to school. He didn't remember getting on the subway, but that was enough of a routine that he could do it without thinking anyway. He wasn't even late. If he had been present enough to register that fact, he would have called it a victory. The bell hadn't even rung yet.

It was MJ that found him first. She was always early to school, curled up in some hallway reading a book. When Peter walked past her, it was fair to say that she was surprised.

"Peter?" She called, closing her book and chasing after her friend. She grabbed his arm, and only then did he seem to notice her.

"Oh, hi MJ," he said. Michelle narrowed her eyes.

"You good there, loser?"

No response. Peter's eyes were dull, as if nobody lived behind them.

"Peter?"

"Huh?"

"I was asking if you were okay," MJ reiterated, "which you are clearly not."

"I'm jus' tired, 'Em," Peter mumbled. "Late night."

Technically, it wasn't a lie. Peter hadn't gotten much sleep at all, but it had mainly been due to the fact that he was freezing his ass off. MJ didn't have to know that part, though.

"Yeah, no. You look half dead."

Peter laughed weakly. MJ frowned.

“Look, I just had a bad night. I’ll be fine,” he said, straightening his back as if it would make him look more awake.

(Hey, it couldn’t hurt, Peter thought. He needed all the help he could get if he wanted to convince MJ to leave him alone.)

“You’ve been having a lot of *bad night* s lately, nerd,” MJ said. Peter looked at the ground. “Hey. We’re worried about you.”

“I’m’kay. I promise.”

Sure enough, Peter was slowly becoming a little more okay as he thawed in the school’s heating. The snow in his hair was melting, leaving a steady trickle of water running down the back of his hoodie.

“You can talk to us, you know, Peter. Me and Ned.” All of the usual playfulness in MJ’s tone had vanished. Peter absently wondered if he was in trouble. “We just want you to be okay. I know you’re... I know this time of year is hard without them, but you deserve to be happy. I’ll be here when you’re ready, loser. Me and Ned.”

Seeing that she wasn’t going to get a response out of him, MJ smiled sadly and pulled out her book, leading Peter to her secluded corner of the halls. He sat down gratefully.

Peter hadn’t even thought about the holidays yet, if he was entirely honest. He was too focused on survival. Him, May, and Ben had always made a big fuss out of Hanukkah every year. He used to look forward to it for months.

Now, the thought of festivities just made Peter sad. Sadness and anger seemed to be the only emotions that he could feel now. The stifling heaviness of his seemingly everlasting grief, and the fire that lit in his stomach every time he thought of Captain America plunging the shield into Tony’s chest.

At least the anger felt like it had a purpose. He was Spider-Man - he could protect Mr. Stark. He *had* to protect Mr. Stark.

He *would* protect Mr. Stark.

The rest of the day passed in a haze of concerned looks and one-sided conversations, but Peter hardly noticed. As soon as school ended, he went out on patrol. In the blink of an eye, night had fallen, and the air was once again frigid.

(Peter didn't really know where the day had gone, but that was okay. All the better, really.)

Peter knew he needed to go home. At least his room at Hadley's house was lukewarm and dry. Maybe he could just sneak inside without anyone noticing. Actually get some sleep for once.

(Okay, that was a stretch, but Peter would definitely try.)

On a normal day, Peter would have been able to sneak in with no problem. Today, however, was not a normal day, and his body was nearing its limits. Peter tumbled through the window and landed clumsily on the floor, only to find himself looking right up at Mr. Hadley.

The man looked at him and scoffed.

"You look pathetic, Parker," he hissed. "Clean the house. You may as well be good for *something*. I want this shithole sparkling by dawn."

Hadley walked upstairs without saying another word, and Peter was left alone, crouching on the worn carpet. He looked up. The house really *was* a mess. He must have been away for too long - it was almost ironic that Mr. Hadley called *Peter* useless, when he was the one who could barely function without his personal maid.

With a sigh and a somewhat hysterical laugh, Peter pushed himself to his feet. He steadied himself against the wall, waited for his vision to clear, and got to work.

If he had been more present, Peter might have noticed the flicker of red hair in the shadows or the glint of metal in the mirror. As it was, though, he was far too exhausted to notice that the cleaning

was finished far faster than usual.

Peter collapsed into bed just as the sun began to rise, murmurs of russian songs echoing through his ears.

“Are you... are you okay, Natasha?” Bucky asked as he drove them home. Neither had acknowledged what they had seen at Peter’s home, and they didn’t plan to.

“None of your business, Barnes.”

“We’ll fix this, you know?”

“Of course we will,” Natasha said. Her voice was flat; Bucky could tell that she was lost somewhere in her mysterious past.

The pair returned home in silence and went their separate ways without a word of goodbye.

Peter felt better when he woke up. Truly. He had just been reckless; he had stayed away from home for too long and neglected his body’s needs. He would just have to do better.

Peter stood up, and once again his vision clouded with stars. He checked the time. It was precisely Far-Too-Late-To-Bother-With-School o’clock. Perfect.

(Doing better would start *tomorrow* .)

It may have been too late for school, but that didn’t mean that he couldn’t go to the lab. As soon as he could stay standing for an extended period of time, at least. Peter quickly swallowed down the last of his protein bars, shot a hasty excuse text to Ned, and called Mr. Stark.

(Because he wanted to make sure he could go to the lab. *Not* because he wanted to hear the man's voice.)

"Hey, Mr Stark!" Peter said with as much energy and cheerfulness as he could manage. "You down for lab-time today?"

"Course, Kid," Tony said. "Shouldn't you be in school, though?"

(Well, shit. He probably should've thought that through.)

"Uh, well you see, the teachers had a termite infection - wait no, the termites had a teacher-"

Tony laughed. "Alright, alright. You're skipping. I'm not one to judge."

"Oh really? I thought you were the picture of obedience, academia, and the american way?"

"That's 'ole Cap you're thinking of there," Tony drawled. Peter's breath caught in his throat at the reminder of the Captain, but he quickly pushed it away.

"Right," he said, trying to keep his voice light. "I should know that from the PSAs"

"The what?"

"Oh my- you've never seen them?" Peter snickered. This could be the perfect start to his revenge plan. "Look them up. Trust me."

"Whatever you say, kid. See you in an hour or so?"

"You bet."

In all reality, Peter made it to the tower in 20 minutes. He couldn't wait. It had been so long since he was actually, truly, unironically excited for something. He finally could just fuck around with science with his ~~dad~~-mentor without a care in the world for hours on end. It made him feel human again.

The scene that Peter walked in on, however, was not careless science.

He didn't find Tony messing around with a car engine, or tinkering with his bots, or even working on one of his suits.

Instead, he saw Friday projecting one of Captain America's PSAs.

And he saw Tony on the floor with his knees pulled to his chest, panicking.

And he saw red.

Peter shut off the PSA quickly.

Tony hardly registered his presence.

He was in a world of his own.

(Poor little Peter Parker, not like the rest.)

Peter clenched his hands into fists.

Captain America had hurt Tony.

~~Captain America had hurt his dad.~~

And he was going to pay.

Chapter End Notes

Wow wow, things are really ramping up! Just sayin' 13 is typically an unlucky number ;)

Thank you to my wonderful and talented beta/GIRLFRIEND for making this possible.
I owe you <333

Drink some water, and have a nice day!

Chapter 13

Chapter Notes

For the people I'd give up everything for. You know who you are, and I love you.

TW: Confrontation, panic attacks, and a smidgen of blood

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

When Peter walked into the common room, there was a dark determination about him. It was as visible as if he had been cloaked with black mist, or at least it was to Natasha and Bucky. Steve, the only other avenger present, seemed perpetually clueless, the curse of being surrounded by spies.

“Peter?” the captain said, his voice sickeningly caring, “what’s wrong?”

Usually, Peter would have nerded out over the fact that Captain America was directly addressing him. Now, though, he barely blinked.

“You could’ve killed him,” he said, locking eyes with the captain and fixing him with a terrifying stare. Natasha got to her feet.

(Peter had hardly noticed that the spies were even there. His sole target was Steve, and nothing else mattered.)

“What?” Steve said, appearing genuinely confused. “Who are you talking about?”

“So there’s more than one person that you almost killed? I wish I was surprised,” Peter hissed. “Here’s a hint. His name rhymes with ‘pony’ and he’s the only person that actually cares about me.”

Steve seemed to stop mid-breath, frozen in place.

Natasha stepped towards Peter, as cautious as if she were approaching a rabid animal. “Peter, you need to calm down, and then we can talk about this, okay?” She said, speaking as softly and calmly

as she could.

Peter's eyes only narrowed further.

"No!" He snapped. "You don't get to tell me what to do! He almost killed my... my *Tony* !"

"Son-" Steve began.

"Don't call me son."

"-Peter," he quickly corrected, "I wasn't going to kill him. I never would've killed him."

(Absently, Peter wondered who he was really trying to convince.)

"Don't try to lie to me," Peter scoffed. "I've seen the footage. I know exactly what happened that night."

Bucky glanced at Natasha, who nodded. "Peter, we all regret the things we did that night," he said softly, trying to approach the teen. Peter only backed further into the corner of the room.

"I'm trying not to be mad at you too, Mr Barnes," he said. "I know you weren't in your right mind. But if you don't back the fuck off right now, then-"

"Language, Peter," Steve interrupted. It was more of an instinctual reaction than a direct effort to stop the kid from swearing at this point. Still, Peter's jaw clenched. Steve stepped closer to him.

Before he had a chance to regain his self control, Peter shoved the captain away from him. All he could see was the shield - that damn shield - being plunged into Tony's chest. Again and again.

Steve flew backwards, landing winded against the couch.

“Don’t you dare lecture me about language when you put a shield in my Dad’s chest,” Peter said, breathing heavily. His eyes widened as he realized what he had just done.

Not everyone could push Captain America across the room.

Steve coughed.

“Peter, how did you-” he began, quickly cutting himself off as Peter backed further into the corner. Without even noticing what he was doing, Peter skittered up the wall until he was crouched in a defensive position on the ceiling.

Maybe Natasha had been right to treat him like a cornered animal.

(If Steve had lived any life less crazy than his own, this would probably have been when he screamed.)

“C’mon, Pete,” Natasha said gently. It was easy to see the barely concealed panic in her tone. “I need you to calm down, my паук.”

“No!” Peter snapped, his anger quickly shifting to an intense, all-consuming fear. “I’m not gonna calm down! You- You all knew. You knew he tried to kill my Dad, and you didn’t tell me.”

(In the panic, Peter didn’t even notice that he was calling Tony ‘Dad.’ Not that it mattered anymore.)

Nat carefully tried to edge closer. “Peter, I know you don’t trust any of us,” she began. “You’re allowed not to trust us, you’re perfectly entitled to that, but right now we just need you to get down and take a breath. We’re gonna sort all of this out, I promise.”

“What do you mean, ‘we’re gonna sort this out?’” Peter asked, narrowing his eyes. That wasn’t a normal thing to say, he didn’t think.

“I know that you barely go home, Peter,” Natasha said, deciding not to beat around the bush. “We’re gonna find you somewhere to stay. We’re gonna tell Tony together, then we’re gonna get this all sorted out.”

Peter stopped breathing. “You know?” he asked.

“Yeah kid, we know,” Bucky said.

(*No, no*, Peter thought. They weren’t supposed to know. *Nobody* could know.)

“Both of you know? You all know?”

“I honestly have no clue what’s going on-” Steve added helpfully.

“Not now, Stevie.”

Peter seemed not to register the disruption.

“You *know* ,” he stated.

Natasha edged closer to his corner. “Peter, I need you to breathe,” she said, her brow furrowed.

“No. You know. You can’t know.”

Without hesitation, Peter punched the closest window. The glass cut into his fists, but he didn’t notice. With shaky fingers, he pulled his hood over his head, and he swung off into the snow-coated city.

Once upon a time, Peter had loved the snow. He had loved the way it covered the entire city like a blanket; he had loved to leave the first tracks in a perfect sheet of white.

Uncle Ben had loved the snow too. They had made a tradition of sneaking onto the roof of their apartment building during every blizzard, just to dance and shout to the abyss. On those nights, the two of them truly felt invincible.

Aunt May had forbidden it on school nights, but Ben had taken Peter as soon as she fell asleep. *There will only be so many of these moments* , he had said. *I think it's worth losing a little sleep to feel this magic, don't you?*

Now, as Peter collapsed onto a rooftop of glittering, untouched powder, all he could see was the blood from his fists. It dripped into the snow around him, spreading out through the crystals.

(Red, red, everything red.)

Ben was right, Peter realized. There would never be any more of those moments.

(‘I’m sorry for staying up so late, May,’ Peter whispered, ‘I just wanted to feel the magic.’)

Peter stumbled to his knees.

He had to get away.

The team would surely tell Tony who he was, and he couldn’t be nearby when that happened. Plus, if he was going to have to move away from Queens, it would be on his own terms.

It wasn’t because he was scared.

Of course not.

It was a purely strategic decision.

No ulterior motives.

Tony had been having a surprisingly good day - the best in a while, if he was honest. He was excited to see Peter, because then he could finally squander his ever present, nonsensical worries. The kid was fine, and maybe when he saw that his brain would finally shut up.

Then, he pulled up the Captain America PSAs that Peter had recommended, and it all fell to shit. He hadn't expected them to trigger him - they had been funny, at first - but soon enough the captain's voice sent him spiraling.

The infuriating part was that he couldn't even blame Cap. Not anymore. He had been blinded by his rage. If someone had tried to kill Rhodey, he would have driven that shield right through their neck, former loyalties be damned.

(Everyone has the one person that they would give up everything for. Tony's was Rhodes, closely followed by Pepper and Happy.)

By the time that Peter arrived, he was too far gone to properly process the way that the kid's jaw tightened. He was too far gone to notice that Peter had left, and he was certainly too far gone to know that an hour had passed.

Nonetheless, the world kept moving without him, and the door to his lab slammed open. Tony shakily wiped the sweat from his brow and straightened himself up, expecting to see Peter. Instead, he was met with Natasha.

This in it's own wasn't necessarily concerning. Nat stopped by the lab to drop off old widow bites from time to time, or even just to check in on him. No, the concerning part was the look on her face.

For the first time in all the years that Tony had known her, he saw fear painted in her features.

He sat up straight. No time for emotions.

"Nat? What's going on?"

Tony saw a tear - an honest to god tear - welling in the spy's eye. She quickly wiped it away.

“It’s Peter,” she said, and Tony stopped breathing. “His foster dad is shit, and he found out that me and Buck know. He ran, Tony. He ran.”

Nausea rose in Tony’s stomach. He had been right. God, he had wanted to be wrong.

He took a deep breath and stood up.

Time to fix this.

“Tony?” Natasha said cautiously. “There’s something else you should know.”

Oh god. Not more.

“Peter is Spider-Man.”

Tony sucked in a deep breath, filling his lungs against their will. He could panic later, he could feel the guilt later, he could analyze the signs and everything he had missed later.

Now, though, he had to find Peter. No time to waste.

“Alright,” he said, not letting his voice even think about cracking. “Let’s find him, then. Kids smart, Nat. We can’t let him go down this path.”

“*Right* , and letting such smarts go to waste wouldn’t be the Tony Stark way.”

“Exactly,” Tony coughed. “No ulterior motive.”

Natasha hummed her agreement. “You start searching the streets, I’ll check his house and get the rest of the team informed. Okay?”

Tony nodded stoically. He was going to find his ~~kid~~ intern.

Someone was gonna need to wear that spidey-suit he'd been working on, after all, and it wasn't about to fit Happy.

Chapter End Notes

Heh, I'm sorry? Don't worry, things will get better for our little spider soon. Again, Peter's views don't necessarily reflect mine, nor do Tony's. I'm just trying to get into these characters heads.

Drink some water and stay safe <33

Chapter 14

Chapter Notes

Almost at the end now. Man that's insane. This entire fic has been a ride.

Anyway, have some angst.

TW: Implied/referenced overdose, negative self talk, general angst and despair ;)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Peter shivered from his rooftop perch, watching civilians roam the streets. They talked and bustled and went about their lives as normal, as if Peter's entire existence hadn't crumbled to dust the night before.

The world kept turning, after all. Only Peter's world stopped.

He didn't know what to do, he just knew that he couldn't go back. Ever. Tony probably knew his identity by now - hell, the whole world could know.

Ned and MJ probably weren't freaking out just yet. It was normal for him to miss a day or two of school. They'd notice soon, though, and they'd probably panic, but eventually they would give up searching. They'd have to move on, and it'd be for the better.

Tony was probably looking by now. Or maybe that was too bold of an assumption, but Peter thought Mr. Stark would at least feel obligated to look. Hopefully he'd give up soon though, and forget all about him. He wouldn't forget Spider-Man, though.

There wasn't anything left for Peter Parker - not anyone that wouldn't be better off without him - and if he went out as Spidey, Tony could find him and turn him into CPS. That couldn't happen.

There was nothing left. Not for Peter or for Spidey.

And yet the world kept turning.

Natasha's first stop was the Hadley household, of course. She was tempted to take Bucky with her - he deserved to be a part of this too - but unfortunately she was above homicide, and she knew that Buck would struggle to hold back.

Besides, this was something that she had to do alone.

The widow snuck into the home, effortlessly becoming a shadow. Her fingers caressed her favorite knife as she cleared each room, just within reach. If Hadley happened to run into her blade, there would really be nothing she could do.

She found the man in the kitchen, collapsed on the table with his head in his arms. Broken bottles were strewn around the room, and Natasha noticed numerous pills scattered across the tabletop. She kicked the chair, and Hadley slumped to the ground.

Natasha checked, and he had no pulse.

It was a shame, really. She would've liked to have made his life a living hell for a little while.

The widow took comfort in the fact that he must have died alone and miserable, without a friend in the world.

Peter thought about going to get food, but he didn't want to leave his rooftop. He wasn't sure how long it had been, but judging by the volume of people on the streets, it was likely early morning. He still had some time before he starved.

Peter didn't know what to do. He knew that he should have been building himself a plan, but he couldn't bring himself to care. Maybe he could create a new life for himself - a new fake identity.

Arachni-boy didn't have much of a ring to it, though.

He curled up in the snow, making somewhat of a nest for himself. He could figure out his future later. For now, Peter only wanted to rest.

At least he wasn't cold anymore.

"Natasha, what the fuck is going on?" Clint asked. Natasha frowned.

"Barton, Rogers, Barnes, Rhodes, Wilson, Maximoff," Natasha said, counting off the avengers on her fingers. She had gathered everyone that she could trust - they needed the manpower, afterall. "Right. Tony's intern, Peter, ran away. I need you all to help find him. I'll answer all your questions later. Am I understood?"

"Aye aye," Sam said, as the others nodded and murmured their agreements. They knew better than to question Nat when she was in mission mode.

"Good," Nat said. "Oh, and he's Spider-Man. Fight about it later, find him now."

She left before anyone could protest.

Peter felt emptier than ever before. Empty and numb.

He couldn't feel anything, physical or emotional, and he couldn't bring himself to be worried about that.

He wasn't lost in his head anymore, though.

His mind was blissfully quiet.

There was nothing left.

Take that, he thought absently, *poor little Peter Parker isn't so lost anymore, is he? No. Now he's just gone.*

Natasha felt a little like a stalker as she parked up outside of Midtown High. It wasn't like she hadn't staked out schools before, but it still felt uncomfortable. She got out of the car and leaned against the door. If she was right, the kids she wanted would find her.

Sure enough, a girl and a boy soon approached her. The girl walked with an authority to her step, while the boy was constantly glancing over his shoulder and looking to the girl for confirmation.

"MJ, are you sure-"

"Of course I'm sure, dumbass. C'mon."

Natasha took the liberty of stepping towards them, since she could tell that not even the girl was as confident as she tried to appear.

"You're Peter's friends, I assume?" Natasha said.

"And you're the Black-Widow," the girl, MJ, replied.

"That I am. You can call me Natasha." The boy looked like he was about to pass out. Natasha didn't blame him. If she met herself, she would probably pass out too.

"I'm MJ, and this is Ned," the girl said, shoving Ned ever so slightly. "Now, where's Peter?"

"He's in trouble. I need to know where he goes when he's upset."

MJ looked to Ned, who took a deep breath.

“I have some places to check, as long as you tell us what’s going on with him.”

Natasha sighed. “It’s not my story to tell.”

“We know about Spider-Man,” MJ said matter-of-factly.

“You do?” Ned stammered.

“You whisper too loud, nerd. Anyway, we’re in this for good, and we want to know what’s going on with our friend.”

“I’ll see what I can do,” Nat said, “but first we need to find him. It’s freezing out here, and spiders don’t take well to the cold.”

Ned nodded and gestured for Natasha and MJ to follow him.

Nat hid a smile. Peter had good friends. Maybe she hadn’t screwed things up entirely after all.

Maybe he still had a chance.

Peter knew that he would have to move eventually. He was cold, hungry, and not far enough away from Avengers Tower. Still, he made no effort to get up. There was no point. He had nobody to get up for. Not anymore.

Maybe he hadn’t had anyone for a long time. Not anyone that needed him, at least. Maybe he had only been a burden since the very night that his parents died, thrusting him upon a couple that had never wanted children. A couple that he proceeded to get killed.

Yeah, maybe.

Peter let himself loose in his memories. If he focused hard enough, he could pretend that he had just fallen asleep in the snow, and his parents would be there any minute. They would make him hot chocolate and swaddle him in blankets and tell him how worried they were.

He knew that when he opened his eyes, it'd all be gone. They'd all be dead again, and he'd be back in his own vicious reality. The reality where he had nobody and nothing.

So he didn't open his eyes, and he didn't move.

He let himself drift off to sleep and hoped that his parents would find him quickly.

Tony was still searching the streets desperately when he got the call. He wasn't planning on picking up until Friday read him the caller ID. Natasha.

"Nat. What do you have?"

"His friends say to check the library. I'm going to the cemetery. The team can keep patrolling the streets."

"Got it," Tony said. "I'll check with the library staff, see if anyone knows him."

"Perfect," Nat said. "And Tony?"

"Yeah?"

"We'll get him. We'll fix this."

“I know we will,” Tony said. He hung up before Natasha could reply.

They’d find him. They had to.

“Parker, you say?” The librarian confirmed, peering over her thick-rimmed glasses. “No, can’t say I’ve seen him lately. Shame. He seemed like a good kid.”

“You’re sure? Anything you can tell me will help. *Anything* .” Tony tapped his foot under the counter, trying not to seem too impatient. He knew how it must look - an old man desperate to find a young, obviously disadvantaged boy - but he was desperate.

“I’m sorry, Sir, but there really is nothing I can do to help you. If it's of any use, feel free to have a look around.”

Tony sucked in a deep breath. *Calm. No time for a meltdown.*

“Thank you,” he said with a polite nod. He slid a business card across to her. “Call me if you see anything.”

Before Tony could take in her starstruck expression, he turned and dove into the bookshelves. His feet took him to the computers on instinct. The place that it had all begun.

He really had been looking for a way to avoid work that afternoon, until he had met Peter. Something about the scrappy boy had been immediately awe inspiring. He’d offered him an internship on the spot.

Maybe he should have just walked away like he had planned to. Scared the kid a little, told him not to hack into anything too important, and left. Then he would never have grown attached, and he could have gone about his life as normal.

But then where would Peter be? Would he himself have spent his entire life avoiding paperwork, thinking that the most important thing in the world was his own happiness?

No. If he had to go back in time, he would have done the exact same thing.

He had to believe that.

Tony ran a hand through his hair and continued through the library. He'd be damned if he didn't find this kid. He couldn't fail him. Not now.

While Peter Parker slept, the world moved around him as if nothing had changed.

It wasn't a surprise. Peter had been a ghost since his birth. Never like the others, never quite able to fit in. He had had everything he needed and most of what he wanted, but Peter still grew up with a hole in his heart. He was never complete, not even before the plane crash.

The world had *always* moved around Peter, leaving him to scramble in the dust. Now, though, he was being left behind. The funniest thing was that he didn't mind.

Peter Parker fell deeper into his slumber, and his heartbeat grew slower and weaker.

As quickly and easily as falling asleep.

Once he had finished searching the library to no avail, Tony was near his breaking point. He knew that Peter was in trouble. He knew that he was close. He just didn't know where to go next.

Tony would never entirely know what possessed him to climb the library's rickety fire escape. Maybe it was him following his inner spider-instincts. Maybe it was pure intuition. Maybe it was a stroke of dumb luck.

Whatever the cause, Tony found himself clambering onto the snow-topped roof under a sky of glittering stars.

(Had nobody told the stars that Peter was missing? Had nobody told them that the world was on hold until he was home?)

In dramatic retellings, long after the trauma had faded, Tony would say that the brightest star had led him to Peter. As compelling of a bedtime story that was, though, the truth was far more mundane.

Tony had been about to break down, finally starting to lose hope, when he'd seen the unnatural mound of snow in the corner of the roof. Then, he saw the snow shift ever so slightly, and he set off running. Tony dug at the snow with his pale, trembling fingers, not even registering the cold.

To his horror, his fingers soon met the fabric of Peter's hoodie. He lifted the boy out of the snow and dusted him off. His skin was unnaturally pale - almost ghost-like.

Tony called his suit.

"Friday, vitals?"

"Peter is hyperthermic, hypoglycemic, and bradycardic. His temperature is critical, and he requires immediate medical attention," Friday responded with urgency.

"Alright," Tony said, "Alright."

Peter stirred in his arms, and he held him closer. He could feel the biting cold of the boy's body through his quickly assembling armour.

"Ben?" Peter croaked quietly, almost inaudible. "Am I there yet, Ben?"

"Yeah, kid. Almost there," Tony reassured, begging his voice not to crack.

“Mm. Thanks Dad.”

In that moment, Tony Stark swore that nobody would ever hurt his son again.

Because he loved him.

No ulterior motive.

Chapter End Notes

...sorry? Heh, I promise the next chapter will fix things.

In other news, I have started a shrine to Natasha Romanoff. It currently consists of a poster and a puzzle that I'm gonna frame. Might add some candles. Natasha truly is a goddess.

Stay safe and drink some water <333

Chapter 15

Chapter Notes

Here we are, folks. The finale. And it's early! Thank you so much for the incredible response to this fic. I still can't process it. This has been a ride, and it makes me infinitely happy that you all came along for it <3

Now, time for the long awaited fluff. Stick around for the sentimental end-note if you want more cringe :))

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Peter Parker awoke similarly to the way that one might snap out of a daydream.

One minute he was lost in the depths of his mind, the next he was back in the real world; disoriented and afraid, unsure how much time had passed.

The last thing that he remembered was curling up in the snow. He had been sure that he was going to die. There was no way that he could have been saved - he had doubted that anyone would even find his corpse for days. Yet somehow, he didn't seem to be a corpse.

Most confusingly of all, Peter wasn't cold. In fact, he was almost warm. He was wrapped in clouds. Warm, cozy clouds.

If this was hell, Peter was pleasantly surprised.

The rhythmic beeping of an EKG, however, quickly alerted him that he was not in fact dead. Peter snapped to attention and strained his senses. He was in an unfamiliar environment, one where his enhancements were likely to be detected. No time for grogginess.

Before he could panic, though, Peter heard a slightly stuttered heartbeat from his bedside. He would recognise that heartbeat anywhere.

"Mr. S'ark?" Peter mumbled, as he forced his eyes open and blinked in the sudden light.

“Peter?” Tony said, sitting up from where he had been slumped over in a cold hospital chair. “You awake, bud?”

“Hmm. No, I don’t think so.”

Tony laughed. “Whatever you say.”

“How long was I out?”

“A day, give or take a few hours. Turns out you needed quite a nap.”

“Oh man,” Peter grumbled, struggling to calculate what he must have missed through his foggy brain.

“Yeah,” Tony said. “You gave us quite a scare, spider-boy.”

Peter’s heart stuttered as memories flooded back. They knew about Spider-Man. They knew about *Hadley* .

The steady beeping of the EKG sped to a panicked, racing rhythm and Tony swore under his breath. Peter hardly noticed. He had to get away - get away before they could take him away.

Unfortunately, his still limbs were not cooperating. His attempts to thrash around were met with the barest twitch.

“-Peter, kiddo, calm down,” Tony said, his voice just barely cutting through Peter’s panicked thought spiral. “I don’t care that you’re enhanced; I don’t care that you’re the Spider-Kid, or whatever. You’re safe here. You’re safe.”

“You-You’re not gonna make me stop?”

“I know you, Pete, so I know that there’s no way in hell that you’re stopping. I am gonna make you do it *safely* , though.” Tony lifted Peter’s chin to look him in the eyes, but the boy squirmed away.

He continued nonetheless. “You’re gonna need backup, proper medical teams on standby, and a damn good suit. None of that underoos nonsense that you had going on.”

“Hey, it was in style!” Peter protested weakly. “Dumpster-chic.”

“Whatever you say, *Underoos*. The one I made is more Stark-chic, if that sweetens the deal, but-”

“You made me a suit?”

“Damn right I did,” Tony said. “Before I even knew who I was making it for. I *am* gonna need you to show me how you make that webbing-shit though, the tensile strength is off the charts.”

Peter’s face fell. “Of course I would, Mr. Stark, but...”

“But what?”

Peter slumped further into his pillow. He *really* didn’t wanna talk about this. “Well, you know about Mr. Hadley, right?”

“I know that he’s a piece of shit,” Tony said carefully after a moment of contemplation.

“Yeah, well I’m probably not gonna be allowed to stay there much longer.”

“You’re not setting foot in that house ever again,” Tony stated matter of factly. “But I fail to see how this relates to our lab time.”

“Well there aren’t many foster homes in Queens, Mr Stark, especially not ones that are willing to take a kid with a track record like mine. I probably won’t be within subway distance of the tower.”

Tony sighed, but only leaned closer to Peter. “Kid, I’ll be damned if I let you go back into another foster home that could be just as shitty as Hadley’s.”

“But then... what’s going to happen to me?” Peter asked.

“How would you like-” Tony started, stopping to take a deep breath. Peter had never seen him this nervous before. “How would you like to stay here, Underoos? At the tower?”

Peter could’ve sworn that there was an audible thunk as his heart hit the floor. Could it really be that easy? Could everything really be fixed, just like that?

(His brain told him *no* , but his heart desperately longed for a *yes*.)

“What’s the catch?” Peter asked. He knew better than to accept a free place to stay without knowing the motivation behind the offer.

“No catch. You need a place to stay, I have infinite money. Easy as that.”

“But why? Do you need me to do work in the lab for you? Or do you need Spider-Man?”

Tony sighed deeply and ran a hand through his hair. Peter froze, trying to decipher what he did wrong. Before he could reach any conclusions, though, Tony spoke. “I want you to live here because I care about you, Underoos. Not because you’re smart, and not because you’re strong. I care about you because you’re the greatest kid I’ve ever met. No ulterior motive.”

For what felt like the millionth time in the time that Peter had been awake, his heart dropped and cold shock ran through his veins. Mr. Stark cared about him.

Mr. Stark cared about him .

“Okay,” Peter said. “I’ll stay.”

The day that Peter had been unconscious was quite possibly the most stressful of Tony’s life, discounting only the day that had been spent searching for him.

Helen's official verdict had been severe hypothermia, malnourishment, and dehydration. She had said that it was a miracle that his organs weren't permanently damaged, even with his metabolism taken into account.

(Everything about that kid was a miracle, wasn't it?)

He had set the legal team on adoption papers immediately. All he knew was that he needed to protect Peter for eternity - logistics and responsibilities be damned. His kid was all that mattered.

Then, he woke up, and Tony had no clue what to say. Cue an awkward invitation for Peter to stay, his best attempt at heartwarming reassurance, and a shaky agreement.

And then, it was *okay*.

Needless to say, both of them were asleep within ten minutes, Tony slumped over with his head resting on Peter's bed. He slept more deeply than he had in months, awakening only when Pepper laid a gentle hand on his shoulder.

"Pep?" Tony mumbled sleepily, stretching out his neck. Pepper shushed him, gesturing towards a still sleeping Peter, and led him outside.

Oh god, Tony thought, still half asleep, I forgot to tell Pepper. I agreed to adopt a kid without telling Pepper.

"So-" Tony began as soon as the door to Peter's room was closed.

"Is there any reason in particular that I just got an email from legal, enquiring as to the nature of my involvement with the adoption of your child?"

"Well, about that-" Tony stammered, struggling to think of an explanation. Pepper simply burst out laughing.

“It was about time. You two are good for each other, Tones.”

“You’re not gonna... assassinate me in my sleep or something, are you?”

“Not yet,” Pepper said, smiling in a way that was both comforting and threatening. “I expect the full story later, though. Once everyone involved has had at least twelve hours of sleep.”

“Of course,” Tony promised. Pepper hugged him tightly in response.

“I’m proud of you, Tony,” she whispered into his ear.

Tony smiled.

Natasha couldn’t stop running through scenarios in her head as she leaned against the wall of the hospital hallway.

What if she had told Tony the moment she knew about Spider-Man? What if she’d taken him straight from Hadley’s house that night and begged him to stay at the tower? What if she’d killed Hadley before he had the chance to do it himself?

But no. None of that had happened, and now she was outside the door to Peter’s hospital room, trying to gain the courage to enter.

Natalia Romanova, short on courage. It was a sight that many would love to see.

Eventually, it was Peter who called out to her.

“I know you’re out there, Miss. Romanoff,” he said, somewhat ominously. “I can hear your heartbeat.”

Natasha slid inside. The sight of Peter hooked up to all those wires made her nauseous.

“Hey паук,” she said quietly. Peter waved, offering her a nervous smile. “I’m sorry,” she said.

“It’s okay,” Peter replied, almost instinctively. “I don’t mind that you told Tony, I was being dumb and it’s all okay now. And you didn’t know that I didn’t know about Steve attacking Tony, so I’m not mad.”

“Yeah, I’m not sorry for that. I’m sorry for not telling Tony sooner.”

“Oh.”

“I failed you, Peter, and now you have to deal with the consequences. I’m sorry,” Nat said sincerely.

“With all due respect, Miss. Natasha, that’s bullshit.”

“Excuse me?”

“Yeah, maybe things could’ve worked out if you’d told Tony sooner, but you had no reason to believe that I was in danger,” Peter continued. “Besides, things are okay now, right? That’s what matters most, I think.”

Natasha chuckled despite herself. How could this kid be so damn good?

“If Tony hadn’t already gotten dibs, I think I’d be in line to adopt you too, little spider. You know where to find me.”

“I really don’t,” Peter mumbled under his breath. Natasha smiled, and then she was gone.

Hacking into Stark Industries was way out of Ned’s comfort zone. As in, his comfort zone was a

mere speck in the distance. But when it was about Peter, Ned was pretty sure he could do anything.

(Plus, if Peter could hack in, surely he could too. He had *taught* Peter.)

Sure enough, with MJ glaring over his shoulder, Ned managed the impossible. He hacked into Stark Industries - more accurately, he hacked into Friday.

Ned's plan had only been to pull Peter's internship records, but MJ had other ideas. As soon as he was in, she stole his keyboard and started typing like a maniac. Turns out, MJ could hack pretty well. Not as well as him, of course, but she managed to discreetly register them both into Friday's system before Ned could even stop her.

When they went to the tower despite Ned's anxious protests, Friday let them right in.

"Take us to Peter Parker," MJ commanded, an authority in her voice that scared even Ned. It seemed to scare Friday too, who promptly took them to the medical wing.

As soon as they found Peter's room, Ned ran in and engulfed him in a hug. He most certainly was not crying. MJ leaned against the back wall and lectured Peter about how much of an idiot he was. She most certainly was not crying either.

They heard all about the adoption and everything that led up to it, though Ned had suspicions that he was holding back some details. Had it been anyone other than Peter, he might have stopped to question *why* Tony Stark was adopting him, but he knew better than to try to understand Peter's life.

In the end, it was Mr. Stark himself who walked the two of them out. He didn't seem mad that they had hacked the building, though. If anything, he seemed impressed.

As Mr. Stark escorted the pair through his private garage, MJ told him to look after Peter. Not even taking a second to process that a teenager was telling him what to do, he nodded solemnly. MJ seemed satisfied with that.

Ned was still too over the moon to properly fanboy. It felt like a miracle to see Peter happy again. Ned was glad. If anyone deserved a miracle, it was Peter Parker.

Peter was discharged from the medical wing three days later, under Dr. Cho's strict instructions to limit physical activity as much as possible for the next few weeks.

That same night, it snowed.

Peter took Tony to the rooftop, and together the two of them ran around and shouted into the abyss as if they were invincible.

Pepper tried to get them inside before they froze, but Peter adamantly refused, because there might only be so many of these moments, and Peter was going to savor every single one.

Because he finally had a family again.

No ulterior motive.

Chapter End Notes

Voila. It's done. Fini. Man that's insane.

When I started this fic, I wrote it in the school hallways and classroom floors with my friend and very much crush. Now, after a few satanic rituals, a dose of gay Jesus, and a vaguely penis shaped cloud, I am proud to call her my girlfriend. This is Peter's story, but Kate, the notes and the voices and the edits will always hold fragments of our story too, if that makes sense.

I poured my heart into this fic, even if it was dreadfully planned, and I'm happy with how it turned out for my first real fic. I could never have predicted that people would actually read the fic that I wrote from a tiny little idea, and I can't thank you all enough for the response this thing has gotten. I love each and every one of you.

But fret not! This is not goodbye! You may have noticed that this is now a series ;) Also, I'm super excited for the next, separate fic that I'm working on. Let me just say, lesbian!MJ as the next black widow in training :)

Anyway, cringey and pretentious end note aside, I hope that you all have epic lives, and to quote Wilbur Soot, 'I love you. Non parasocial.'

End Notes

Thanks for reading! Comments and kudos are always appreciated - especially with feedback! I have no clue what I'm doing lol, so any tips are appreciated. I try my best to reply to comments though I am notoriously bad at it, but every comment always makes my entire day! Stay safe and drink some water <3

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!